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THE MATRIX

BY

MARIA THOMPSON DAVIESS

Author of "Blue-grass and Broadway," "The Golden Bird," "The Melting of Molly," etc.

NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1920

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Published, February, 1920

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FOREWORD

In this period of the History of the United States of America, when men and women have again been called upon to sacrifice and die to preserve and extend the liberty upon which their great Democracy is founded, it behooves us to examine and pass judgment upon all of its foundation stones. The author claims that the Romance of Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks, the father and mother of Abraham Lincoln, is one of those foundation stones. It has been chipped at and marred and banked over by the dust of time since those pioneer days in which it was enacted, of which so little of fact, but so much of tradition remains. The author has dug deep into all legends and collected as much as possible of documentary evidence, and now presents the reconstructed romance

as a work of fiction for which she hopes she has been granted a measure of inspiration. Her hope of such inspiration is based on the fact that she was born and reared in the same little Bluegrass valley which was the cradle of the great romance, and many of the traditions which she has used in her building are her inheritance. The principal source of her courage to make such an attempt, and material for the work, came from the research into the lives of these humble parents of the great Lincoln, conducted over a period of many years by her aunt, Hannah Daviess Pittman, genealogist of distinction, whose conclusions agree with those of Caroline Hanks Hitchcock, set forth in a small volume on the subject. If this story of the love of brave Nancy Hanks, who had herself been held captive by the Indians, for the simple rough abolitionist, Thomas Lincoln, in whom she must have both planted and fanned the flame of the desire for human liberty and equality, makes the reader feel

that the primitive greatness of heart and soul of these two pioneers was destined to assure the production of Abraham Lincoln, and gains for them due credit for that greatness, the author will rest content.

Abraham Lincoln, sixteenth President of the United States, and author of the Emancipation Proclamation, said of his mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln: "All that I am or ever hope to be, I owe to my angel Mother, blessings on her memory."

THE MATRIX

THE MATRIX

CHAPTER I

A GREAT love is nourished by the ebb and flow of the race blood in the generations before it, and when it becomes an iridescent matrix it is very apt to produce the pearl of price. The great twilight stars watched when her father lifted wee Nancy Hanks down from a pack-saddle, in which he had brought her along the Wilderness Trail from Virginia to Kentucky, into the strong, awkward, eager arms of young Thomas Lincoln.

"Careful, Tom; the little maid is asleep," cautioned the father. "Since we got her away from the redskin devils back on the

trail a month ago, she starts in her rest to fair break your heart."

Even at her father's low-voiced caution the long black lashes lifted from the big purple eyes, which were as dark as the twilight shadows coming down through the branches of the tall oaks that hovered the Lincoln cabin, and a little shudder began to thrill through the small body, which subsided at the cradling of the boy's strong arms.

"Hush-e, hush-e, honey bird," the boy crooned in a voice of the husky softness of adolescence, as he hugged her closer with a strange hunger in his serious, strong face, with its dark eyes and square jaw, surmounted by a shock of black hair.

Young Nancy took one look at her protector, snuggled her head close under his chin, and fairly melted away into the depths of sleep.

"They ain't no kind of baby Tom won't

mother, from a nigger to a skunk," said Mordecai Lincoln, as he watched the boy go slowly, crooning to his burden, into the cabin. "Since Pa and Ma died last year, looks like his grieving has sorter set him on pitiful things."

"He can't look after my Nancy none too perticular, since we so near lost her," answered big Joseph Hanks, as he followed the boy and the child with keen, watchful, tender eyes. "Here, Mother Nannie, let me help you 'light. Give mother a hand on the other side, Mort; she 's stiff from the long setting of this month's journey from Virginia."

"I make you a hearty welcome, Aunt Nancy, and I hope this house we built fer you here in Kentucky will suit your notions," said Mordecai, as he carefully helped his aunt down from the high seat on a weary mule, back of the pack saddle from which sleeping Nancy had been lifted.

"I 'll ask for nothing more than strong bars to the doors and windows from the Indian murderers that killed your Aunt Sarah Mitchell and stole her little Sarah a month gone," answered the pioneer woman in a firm voice that had in it all the sadness of bereavement but no tears.

"That you 'll have, Aunt Nancy, and muskets always on the trigger fer you and yourn. But there are 'most too many of us in this settlement for the red devils to bother us, any more now. They ain't raided since they killed Pa and we got five out of six of 'em," big Mordecai reassured her.

"I pray God it may be so," answered the mother of Nancy, as she gave a last look back into the savage-infested forest through which she had come, passed the mules of the caravan which her husband was beginning to have unloaded, and went down the path through the clearing into the home they had built in the wilderness for her.

That night there was a gathering of the Lincoln and Hanks clan in the new Hanks home, in front of the wide fireplace in which was now smoldering only a small spring fire of fragrant cedar chips, though into the wide, dark cavern there could be piled a half wagonload of logs against the chill of winter snow.

At one side of the fireplace sat huge Mordecai Lincoln with his long gun between his knees, telling his uncle Joseph Hanks the particulars of the death of his father, following whose lead Joseph, with his three brothers-in-law, Berry, Sparrow, and Mitchell, had come out from Virginia to pioneer into the lush bluegrass valleys of the Dark and Bloody Ground. Richard and Lucy Berry sat beside him, listening and talking, eager to hear it all at once, for they were to go on farther into the wilderness to their cabin which had been built on a rich land claim at Beechland by Beach Fork River.

Mother Nancy was moving swiftly about the room, still settling her household goods though joining in and directing the conversation; and over in the corner by the flickering light crouched Tom Lincoln, close to the rude cot of split cedar rails on whose interlaced cords was swung the feather bed, in which slept wee Nancy. A group of Berry and Hanks boys sat on the floor beyond him, listening eagerly to the talk of the men, while Betsy and Polly Hanks and Nancy Sparrow crouched opposite, knitting in the firelight.

"Pa had gone out into the clearing with Josiah and both of 'em had set their muskets against a tree about fifty feet from the one they was felling, which they ought not to have done. I had turned back to the house, when the six red devils came outen the woods and—and done for Pa." Mordecai was relating with the dignified quiet of the pioneer when under any strain of emotion. "Josiah

seen them split Pa's head open and he fought himself loose from 'em and run. He got away; but after Ma died from grieving, in a little less than three months, Josh could n't stand living in the sight of that clearing and he went West. He 'lowed to kill redskins as he went and I reckon he did."

"It was the same way with Brother Mitchell," said Joseph Hanks with a huskiness in his throat, and a hard glint in his eyes as he heard this simple story of the murder of his brother-in-law by the savages, who had so nearly stolen from him his own treasure, sleeping warm and safe across the hearth from him. "After they had killed Sister Sarah and tooken Sarah, about as big as Nancy there, who somehow got back, Mitchell, he give the two boy children to their Uncle and Aunt Berry and lit out to follow and kill. He 'll do it shore."

"How 'd the redskins git at a big party like you 'alls, Uncle Jo?" asked Mordecai.

"With you and Uncle Dick Berry and Tom Sparrow, and the boys they must a-been ten men."

"We was fools, that 's how," answer Joseph as he took a twist of Virginia tobacco from his pocket, cut a quid for both Mordecai and Tom Sparrow, also one for Richard Berry, which was refused, before he put one into his own square jaw. "We was all camped down for the night by that clear spring at the foot hill just after you come through the big Gap. We 'd killed a young deer, had venison roast fer supper, et heavy and was all tired out. Mother here had put Nancy and Sarah to bed next a pillion furtherest from the fire on account of wanting 'em to go to sleep away from the talking. After we was all bedded, here the Injuns come down on us! We had n't noticed nothing."

"Yes, we had noticed one thing," interrupted Richard Berry, as Joseph spat ex-

pertly into the left-hand corner of the chimney farthest from him. "As I came back from seeing to the ox teams I heard an owl hoot in a most strange manner, and I told Jo that it gave me the creeps. Did n't I, Jo?"

"That was about the hundredth and sixth owl you had got creeps from since you started, Brother Berry," answered Joseph as he crossed fire in tobacco juice with Mordecai Lincoln.

"That 's it, sir, the man who knows nothing knows all," declared Brother Berry with genial acidity as he took out a huge gold snuff box, and by the use of the contents procured for himself an equally huge sneeze. Richard Berry, being both a philosopher and a man of comparative wealth, was regarded with respectful esteem by the entire family, though he was at all times in friendly discord with his brother-in-law, Joseph Hanks.

"You were telling Mort about the raid,

Joseph," prompted Mother Nancy with pacific intent as she gave satisfied glances into the fours corners of the large cabin at all the pillowed young Hanks heads beside which were laid Mitchell orphans and a few Sparrows in the split-rail beds.

"Was I a-telling it or Brother Berry?" was Joseph's belligerent answer.

"Go on with the narrative, Brother Hanks," urged Mr. Berry courteously, though gaining the victory with the one erudite word which Joseph Hanks scorned to notice.

"As I was a-saying when cut off, we had n't noticed nothing and in the dead of night they lit on us with a yell. I kicked the chunks of fire together, and I seen a big Indian right by Sister Sarah Mitchell and—" the hardy pioneer's words faltered and Lucy Berry's soft voice took up the story with a little sob:

"She did n't suffer none, Mort, and she

died before she knew about—about Sarah being stole away."

"We killed two and lit out after 'em as far as we dared go from the wimmen and children in the dark," continued Joseph with hard lines across his mouth. "It was a whole hour before we found they had taken the two little girls. God, Mort, when I found my baby Nancy gone I—"

But here an interruption occurred in the tragic story; small Nancy suddenly sat up in her rude bed and began to sob, looking wildly about in the half light. Quickly her mother started to her, her father half rose from his seat, and Richard Berry was about to ponderously cross the hearth in her direction when she was gathered into Tom Lincoln's strong arms before any of them could reach her.

"Hush-e, hush-e, honey bird," he crooned with his cheek on hers; and again his charm worked. To the astonishment of the rest of

the sympathetic party the long lashes almost instantly fell over the wild purple eyes and the frightened mite nestled back into the arms she had already learned to trust.

"That 's the first time she ain't had a bad crying spell when she waked up since that morning she crawled back into camp. We have n't ever been able to ask her about how she got aloose 'cause she begins to tremble and cry for Sarah, that she loved as a sister, if she was only a cousin. We just have to tole her along not to think about it any more," said her father in an undertone, as they all sat quietly and watched the big awkward boy rock and croon over the five-year-old.

"Tom sure has got her pacified. Let 's let him take her home with him, father," said William Hanks, a big strapping young pioneer of twenty years, with a brotherly twinkle in his eyes, as he looked at the small sleeping girl in Tom Lincoln's arms.

"Rather have her than a skunk kitten, Tom?" questioned Ned Berry, a swaggering sixteen-year-old boy with bright blue eyes, a thatch of gold hair and almost as tall as his father.

A quick, rare smile spread across young Thomas' bashful face as he went on with his crooning and rocking.

"She won't be skeered any more after I git her tamed," he whispered.

"Taming a woman is a job that begins again as soon as it ends, Thomas," observed Mr. Berry over his snuff box as the men began to collect their rifles quietly, preparatory to betaking themselves to the hay mow in the field, as the cabins would be needed for the feminine and juvenile members of the family party, until the Berrys and the Sparrows should move on to their cabins at Beechland. The taming of Nancy Hanks was never accomplished by Thomas Lincoln or the world at large.

Perhaps, when offered the choice, it would have been wiser for Tom to have chosen the guardianship and education of the skunk kitten, rather than the position of protector to small Nancy, for she proved a veritable will-o'-the-wisp to him, and before she was done with him, beckoned him into far places.

"Go to Tom, Nancy," became, as the days, weeks and months passed, a veritable slogan in the Hanks cabin, teeming with and running over as it was with pioneer life and activity.

"I don't see how I could make out if Tom did n't keep Nancy safe and pacified so much of the time," sighed Mother Hanks as she, her daughters, Betsy and Polly, and one of the frying-size boys began on the weekly task of dipping candles in deer and bear tallow they had rendered in the huge iron kettle in the open.

"I 'm mighty glad she don't tag me like she does Tom," young Jo Hanks congrat-

ulated himself as he shoved a fat pine chunk farther under the big steaming kettle.

"Nancy gits her way and goes it," observed Polly Hanks as she dipped a row of six strong cotton cords, fastened in a line on a cedar slab into the kettle of melted tallow, and waved them in the air to let the grease harden, by repeating which process she was as sure to evolve six straight and sightly candles as was the old red sun to set just as the time for lighting them would arrive. "She et five fried apple pies for her dinner and looks like her stomick could n't er held more than two under her apron. I did n't want to give 'em to her but was afraid not to."

"She tooken three of 'em to Tom, I seen her give 'em to him. His sister Susie don't give him but two for his dinner. She ain't his mother," observed young Hanks as he again fed the chunks to the fire under the candle factory.

"Nobody but mothers understand rightly that boys are hollow from hoofs to horns," observed Mother Hanks as she gave her row of candles the tenth dip and wave, which brought them to about the size of a slate pencil. "I must look more careful after Tom's fodder. I don't think Mordecai's wife is child wise and his good mother has gone on before."

"Keep her soul, Lord Jesus," said tall Betsy Hanks devoutly.

"Amen!" answered Mother Hanks as she went on with her dipping.

Pioneer women had need to lean heavily on the "everlasting arms."

And for more things than the tending of small Nancy could Thomas Lincoln be depended upon.

From his earliest years Tom had been a passionate woodsman, and he knew his Kentucky forests as well as any redskin on the Dark and Bloody Ground, and loved them

as well. He watched all the trees and bushes through their spring budding, their summer leafing, past their gaudy autumn parade to their winter starkness, and knew accurately what their processes would yield in food, fuel and clothing for man and beast. The entire Lincoln household counted on the great piles of hickory and walnuts that Tom gathered, hulled, sunned and stored, while the autumn sun shone, against the long nights by the big winter fires. Day after day he brought in great branches of elderberry for wine, and long vines of wild grape for jelly, the sugar for which he obtained in the spring from tapping the tall maple trees; and only Tom knew how to select the ears of Indian corn that would pop into white kernels on the hot stones before the fire.

"Bird, beast and root, Tom could make his living if you turned him loose in the woods," his brother Mordecai remarked boastfully to his uncle Jo Hanks, though the guard-

lanship of young Thomas, which had fallen upon his shoulders at the death of his parents, sat lightly upon him.

"Why don't you teach him to read?" his uncle Joseph asked, as he steadied a tall cedar post that huge Mordecai was raising upon which to nail the timbers for a new shack.

"Got no time to fool with him. He 's all right; as long as a boy has rabbit and bear and turkey track to set his traps by, he don't need to read and write books." This educational value was decided by the own uncle of the man who less than a century later delivered an address at Gettysburg which is the foundation stone upon which rests American literature.

"Shoo, Nancy knows her a-b's right now, and says 'em to me every night. She is going to graduate to c-a-t tonight if I get home in time," bragged Joseph, the father of Nancy, as he tramped the dirt tight

around the pole, while Mordecai went on to another.

"Well, Nancy can read Tom's 'cats' to him and let him keep to the turkey tracks," Mordecai answered, as he bent his broad back to the raising of a pole that it would take four of his descendants to lift from the ground.

Thus arbitrarily was dismissed the education of Thomas Lincoln, the father of Abraham.

Pioneer life is hard at its best, and is there not some excuse for not setting a getter of rations at spelling book and pot hooks, when the family pot is always in danger of showing an empty bottom? It is just not to resent the fact that Thomas Lincoln was forced to spend a great part of his life in the woods tracking and trapping, until the advent into his life of Nancy Hanks, who had herself been tracked and trapped.

CHAPTER II

AND the arrival of Nancy Hanks into the trapping profession of Tom Lincoln on a July morning was with the cyclonic violence of cloud and tear burst followed by sunshine. It happened in this way.

A half mile down on Lincoln Creek, Tom had set his traps to catch young frying size turkeys, which begin to run free about the last of June. He had been urged to an early trapping because Jo and Bill Hanks had been out for deer two days before and had come in with six of the young bronze poults hanging from their belts. That night Mother Hanks had had a great wild turkey fry and Nancy had run down the dirt road to the Lincoln house to summon Tom, as was

her habit when ever the huge fire in the little lean-to log kitchen of her own abode gave forth what seemed to her a particularly attractive odor.

"Better feed him some of that c-a-t outen your spelling book, Nancy, instead of fried turkey," teased huge Mordecai, as he pushed his rush-bottomed chair back from his own scoured table, which had been split with an axe out of a cedar tree that had grown a century for that utilitarian purpose.

"Not me, never," retorted Tom, as he wiped his mouth on his hickory shirt sleeve. "Reading is for girls."

"Or maybe he'd eat a little d-o-g for you, Nancy," jeered Mordecai's wife, Susie, as she polished the grease off a bunch of small Lincoln countenances with the end of a homespun towel, wet from a gourd dipped in the cedar piggin of water by the door.

"Hush up your mouth, Cousin Susie,"

flamed back Nancy with rage, fairly snapping from the black fringed violet eyes at what her six years was able to recognize as an insult to her beloved protector.

"Don't talk mean to Tom. My mother says always save the liver wing 'for him 'cause his mother is dead.' "

"Jest listen to the sass-box," further jeered the rough young pioneer woman, as she began to bed her two-headed brood.

"Shoo, Susie, let the little maid be," cautioned Mordecai, "don't you know that she 's Uncle Jo and Aunt Nancy's pie-child since the redskins almost got her? Here, Nancy, take a slab of Cousin Susie's sweet cake with hickory nuts in it." As he spoke he held out a slice of the delicacy to the important and offended young relative.

For a moment Nancy eyed the offered appeasement haughtily, then the sunshine broke over her face, curled the young lips into a moist rose bud flanked with rippling

dimples, and she held out her brown, briar-scratched little hand with a gurgle of joy.

"Thank you, Cousin Susie," she said with a funny little bob and back step of one dusty stump-toed foot, which was a pioneer version of a curtsey brought with other gentle traditions by Mother Hanks from Virginia.

Mordecai laughed heartily at the tactful assault on his rough and tumble wife, who secretly adored the dainty young lady cousin, and was determinedly modelling the tow heads upon her pattern.

"Ain't she the beauty though," observed big Mordecai, as he watched Nancy go down the road hand in hand with burly, awkward Tom in his hickory shirt and butternut jeans trousers, with rawhide suspenders holding them together. "She split that slab of cake with Tom in justice and they is both a-munching away fer dear life."

"She sure have got a way with you men folks and boys. You notice her against her

own good," rough Susan began to complain.

"Here, let me tote a couple of buckets of water from the spring fer you," Mordecai offered as a price for escape from a scolding, the like of which he had encountered before. Susan's vicious jealousy was a fire that smouldered to blaze at the slightest provocation and the atmosphere of her household was often sultry from the conflagration.

"You 're soft about both Tom and Nancy and you 'd better keep it for your own children and me," she grumbled after his retreating figure.

"Well, you make it hard enough for Tom with Ma gone," Mordecai ventured back from a safe distance, then went whistling on his way.

Susan's blaze flared on the kitchen threshold.

"Git your supper outen the skillet and git out of my sight," she commanded a little

double jointed, round headed negro boy by name Runt, whose mother, in a high red cotton turban, was shifting the pots and skillets in the big fireplace. The Lincoln mother had brought Mammy Jude and her family from Virginia with her, and while the black woman and her husband and children had gone with the land to big Mordecai, after the English first-son custom, to which Virginians held for many generations, to Tom had been given the little Runt.

On her death bed, to which she had taken after seeing her husband brought home from the murdering Indians, gentle Mary Lincoln had said to Mordecai:

"Give Tom Jude's Runt. He 's pitiful in nature and will look after the poor thing."

"All right, Ma," Mordecai had answered, and Mordecai Lincoln's word was as good as any man's word or bond. The Runt was Tom's property.

But being "Tom's nigger" often brought the hand of Susan down heavily upon the fate of Runt. He knew when to vanish into thin air.

The turkey fry at Mother Hanks' could have been fairly called a successful repast, and Nancy gathered a pile of drum bones, a few wings and a back to give on a clean cedar chip to the Runt, who at all times squatted beside the door of any interior which contained his master, Tom.

"Runt," said Tom, as he came to the door. "We 'll set snares tonight. These Hankses beat us onct, but we 'll ketch up with 'em and get a dozen poults fer Aunt Nancy tomorrow."

"We shure will," answered the Runt with a grin nearly a foot wide as Nancy reappeared in the back door beside Tom with a slice of bread and brown sugar for him.

"Nice little Runt," she said, as she watched the dainty feed the grin.

The Runt's smile was sugared adoration.

It was on the following day that Tom and the Runt got into trouble with young Nancy.

It happened on the edge of the forest where they had set their snares in the dead of night and it perhaps was the spark that started the conflagration of 1861.

"Glory, Mars Tom, they is three in this pen and hit is the furst one. We 'll shore git our dozen fer Miss Nancy ter day," chuckled the Runt as he knelt by the square prison, made of latticed cedar sticks which had fallen upon the three beautiful bronze wild things when they hopped on the spring, while feeding on the corn he had spread cunningly thereunder. Runt was as captive as they, only did n't realize it and failed to beat against the custom that caged him as they beat their bronze wings and breasts against the cedar sticks.

"We 'll just tie their feet together and go get the others further down stream and kill

'em all at onct," directed Tom as he bent to examine his catch. "They shore are fat and Aunt Nancy will—"

And then the volcano whirled into the situation.

Small Nancy splashed across the creek upon her usual adventure of tagging Tom, and stood beside the two boys kneeling upon the ground, tying the feet of the young turkeys.

"I saw you a-going, Tom Lincoln, without me and then I had to come to find you and—what is that, Tom?"

The child had put her arm around Tom's neck and bent to see what it was in which he and Runt were so absorbed with excited interest, and then suddenly she stood erect with horror freezing her laughing face.

"What is it, Tom?" she asked again, with a flutter in her throat.

"It 's a snare we 've trapped some poults in fer supper, honey bird," Tom answered.

"We are going to tie their legs and take 'em home to kill."

"No, Tom, no! Let 'em go quick, quick!" Nancy suddenly wailed as she stood shuddering with her face in her hands. "I can't stand it, Tom, let 'em go."

"But you et poults that Bill and Jo shot for supper last night, Nancy," remonstrated Tom, while Runt sat back on his bare feet and rolled his big eyes with helpless astonishment as this battle, which was to be for his ultimate freedom, began. "I 'm the champeen trapper and hunter hereabouts and you don't want 'em to shame me, do you?"

"Them poults was killed when they did n't know it, Tom. They was n't tied. Let 'em go, let 'em go. I can't stand it. Nobody oughter tie nothing alive."

"But, Nancy, honey, we are going to—"

At this Nancy took her hands down from her white little face in which her violet eyes

blazed with a great fire, while her small body shook from her bare stumped toes to the crown of her red-brown hair, and the wound in her own bosom was laid bare and began to flow for the saving of the small forest captives of the present, and perhaps for the liberation of a multitude in the distant future. Fear had been dammed up in her childish heart and had eaten into her vitals. Now the gates of her emotions were opened.

"Let 'em go, Tom, let 'em go," she wailed. "That Indian what carried me away in the night over his shoulder, he put his hand on my throat and squeezed it so I could n't call Daddy. He walked and he walked and he walked in the dark right towards a big star, and then he stopped and—and—and he tied Sarah and me with ropes to a tree while they all drinked outen bottles and went to sleep. Sarah cried and cried but I—I jest gnawed and gnawed at that rope until I got loose. I put my back to the star and runned

and runned, while the Indian was asleep, and got back to my Daddy and Mother, but, oh Tom, Sarah is still tied and crying. Nothing in this world ought to be tied. Let 'em go free, Tom, let 'em go free."

The dark eyes in the somber boy's face caught fire from the flame in those of the small woman above him, and with a twist he snapped the bit of hemp cord and threw the poults high into the air.

"Lordy!" yelled the black, not taking in the situation, though it touched him most nearly.

"Go turn 'em all out of the snares, Runt," Tom said quietly. "We 'll take the guns and go see how many we can shoot on the wing."

"And never shut up and tie no more, Tom?" Nancy questioned, with a radiance breaking all over her storm-tossed little face. "Oh, Tom!" With which she clung to him fiercely and pressed her face against his

hickory shirt just about at the height of the tender heart in his left breast.

"Because you was tied I 'll never tie nothin' again, Nancy," Tom answered, and with which vow he took upon himself a fate that followed him even until his three-score and tenth year. "Now go on home, while I stand here and watch you. You know you ain't 'lowed this far in the clearing without nobody watching you. We got to do some hunting today or git beat by the Hankses."

"I 'll go back, but don't you never again go nowhere without asking me if you kin. I 'm going to always follow you," was the autocratic answer, as young Nancy prepared to take her departure, thoroughly herself again.

"Well, git," answered Tom with an indulgent twinkle in his grave eyes, that came only at his small charge's most outrageous demands. "When you git big enough to wear a apron, you kin tie me to its strings."

"Hush your mouth," flung back Nancy, making spray fly as she splashed across the creek.

"Aunt Nancy said you had to learn two Bible verses if you said that sass to anybody again," Tom called across to the bank on which Nancy stood, poised for a barefoot flight down the road towards the Hanks cabins in the distance.

"Well, you ain't anybody," was the answer flung at him over a flying shoulder.

"Huh-who-huh," guffawed Runt from a little distance in the clearing.

"You come on with that gun if you 'low for us to git more than any dozen poults this day," commanded Tom. With which he and his bondman disappeared into the wilderness.

The day's bag was fourteen poults shot on the wing and the Lincoln records were again safe.

"What made you shoot all day instead of

snaring what you could have done in an hour or two, Tom?" questioned big Mordecai, who had come over to his aunt's for supper at the news of this second turkey fry, bringing Susan and one of her nut cakes with him.

Joseph Hanks, young Jo, Billy, Mordecai, and the other boys were taking their ease in the twilight with their rush-bottomed chairs tilted back against the front of the cabin. Mother Hanks sat in her rocker and Susan Lincoln and Polly sat on a bench under the huge oak roof trees knitting, while Betsy within was putting the household in order for bedding. There was also a guest of honor for the occasion, as Richard Berry had ridden over from Beechland, bringing saddlebags of gifts from sister to sister and a head full of news and contentions, the latter especially for his beloved brother-in-law, Joseph Hanks. He sat in a large arm-chair and Nancy, his beloved, sat upon his knee,

while Tom Lincoln lounged on the ground near by, with Runt crouched in the shadow back of him.

"Yes, what did you shoot fer, Tom, with powder as skeerce as you know it is?" Susan quarreled at the boy, thus scarring Tom's moment of triumph with her sordid ill temper and dislike.

"Shoo, Susie, don't jaw the lad when he 's made a record of six above any man's in the settlement," admonished Richard Berry, he being the only person present who dared to take issue with Susan's bad temper. "Your nigger did n't shoot none for you, did he, Tom?" he joked.

"I 'd jest like to see anybody in this settlement dignify a nigger with a gun," Susan snapped, in spite of the curb put upon her by the revered brother-in-law, Berry.

"No, sir, Runt can't shoot," answered Tom.

"You 'll both git back to your trapping

after this show off with valuable gun powder," growled Susan.

"Tom ain't never going to trap nothing alive any more. He promised me," announced small Nancy from her perch upon the august Berry knee.

"Well, I reckon the Lincoln family will starve next winter fer rabbit stew if you say so, Nancy," jeered Susan.

"Hush your mouth, Cousin Susie—yes, Mother, I 'll learn three verses of the Bible for the sass—and don't say Tom will any more tie up and trap things. No big Indian ever squeezed your throat and tied you with a rope you had to gnaw to git back to your Daddy and your uncle Berry. Oh, say, Tom won't have to tie 'em any more, Uncle Berry," with which the small champion of liberty began to tremble and cling to the head of the family with his gold snuff box.

"Praise God she has spoken out and

maybe we can hear something about little Sarah," ejaculated Mother Hanks.

"Sarah cried and cried while I gnawed the rope. She would n't gnaw," Nancy sat up and said with a flame in her eyes. "A man Indian wanted to slap her but a woman Indian would n't let him."

"I reckon mother hearts are about the same size, white or red," ejaculated Mother Hanks, clasping her hands with their knitting needles to her bosom. "I pray protection for the child if alive from the dear Lord."

"Amen, Sister Nancy," answered Mr. Berry devoutly.

"Because I was tied, me and Tom ain't never going to tie things," intrepid Nancy continued shrewdly, determined to have the matter out in family council, while she would have the weight of Uncle Berry's opinion on her side as she was sure from former experiences it would be cast.

"The question of human freedom is agitating the United States just about as much as the question of animal liberty is rippling the surface of our family circle," Mr. Berry declaimed over his gold snuff box, thus suavely covering the minor particular question with the larger, general one. "I see the Massachusetts State is for selling the blacks into the Southern colonies and freeing their consciences while filling their pocketbooks. The blacks die in Massachusetts."

"We 'll take 'em all," said Joseph Hanks, surveying his clearing which was beginning to stretch deep into the primeval forest. "I am thinking to buy two good bucks before snow flies."

"A trader came into Beechland last month and I bought a likely black boy six feet two for six hundred dollars. He ran away and caught up with the trader before morning," Mr. Berry related, after a pinch of snuff and its results.

"What did you do?"

"Brought him back and confined him a few days!" The big word got past small Nancy on his knee trying to listen but nodding drowsily.

"Did it work?"

"Yes, after Lucy had made me ride a day and a night to buy his wife and two yearling pickaninnies from the trader at four hundred and fifty. Got 'em both working out a cotton patch and the louder they sing the faster they work. They are as fat and happy as chipmunks. Here, Tom, take your baby into the house, she 's fast asleep."

"Yes, take her, Tom, she won't know it if you move her, and I don't want her to wake and cry for Sarah," said Mother Hanks as her needles began to fly again.

Tom reached up and took small Nancy into his arms, but instead of carrying her in to bed, he cradled her on his knees and listened to the rest of the conversation as it

meandered over the question of the right or wrong of human liberty.

"Well, I 'low I 'll be able to keep two bucks if I git 'em," drawled Joseph Hanks.

"Well, I must say I sorter sympathize in my conscience with Massachusetts about freedom, but my tobacco and cotton have got to be worked," said Mr. Berry. "I can't feel like the Lord intended us to buy and sell human beings."

"That ain't the way to look at it, Brother Berry," Joseph Hanks answered as he rolled a quid of tobacco in his mouth. "He brought 'em outen savage lands fer us to make human beings of and we 've got to have the say over 'em same as our children, 'cause they have got no more sense than children."

"Then if it 's right for Uncle Berry to tie up and buy and sell his nigger, it is right for you to tie up and buy and sell me, which it ain't. Everybody oughter be free of every-

body." Tom Lincoln's quiet voice, in which the deep tones of a man made a bass for the soprano notes that still lingered from his boyhood, cut into the conversation. As he spoke, Nancy stirred in his arms and he rose and took her into the house away from the argument.

"That boy has got more curious notions than a dominicker hen has got stripes, and he's jest as techy as she is when setting," observed young Jo Hanks. "Not trapping 'cause Nancy don't want him to, huh?"

"Well, if Nancy don't want him to he ain't a-going to if it reminds her of Indians," decided big Mordecai with shrewd indulgence, for he was mindful of the fact that he was to enter a triangle mule deal with his uncles Hanks and Berry in the morning and he wanted them unruffled by trouble with the mutual apple of their eyes. "Runt can do the trapping and keep it outer Nancy's sight. Tom's big enough for

learning carpentering with Joe here, anyway."

"Yes, I'd like to learn him on that new barn we all are going to raise next week," said young Jo with a shrewd twinkle in his eyes, very like his father's. "Tom is as big and strong as any man now, if only sixteen. Wanter work with me, Tom?" While he was speaking Tom had deposited Nancy in her sister Betsy's care and returned to the family conclave.

"Yes," answered Tom quietly, thus renouncing for himself the freedom of a woodsman to tie himself to a carpenter's bench because of his promise to the cause of freedom he had given Nancy Hanks in the sixth year of her existence, A. D. 1790.

CHAPTER III

TIME raced along with the years for small Nancy Hanks on the fleet wings of the wild geese driving north in the summer and south in the winter. The blush of pink-budded springs deepened to the flush of golden and empurpled autumns. Summers came and passed with seed time and harvests. The fields were now once and again in bloom with delicate daisy-like wild flowers which follow the wake of the cradlers of grain. The zig-zag worm-like fences of rails, dividing the fields, fenced in their corners riots of crimson vines, and tall regiments of golden rod that defied the autumns and the harvests until the snow flurries of winter seared them and laid them low.

The small Nancy waxed strong and grew;

how she grew! The little settlement on Lincoln Creek, which had grown with her growth into a hamlet of a score or more houses with a log tavern for passers on the Wilderness Trail, and a clapboarded roofed church, marveled with pride in her prowess and spoiled her as if she were some young princess of the royal blood.

"Yes, Miss Nancy is training me to train vines in my sixtieth year with no regard to my rheumatics at all," grumbled tall, lean Mr. George Haskins, the tavern keeper, to Elder Jesse Head, the Methodist Circuit Rider, who sat on the front porch near the door. Mr. Haskins stood on an upturned barrel and wound the tough shoots of a scarlet trumpet vine over the doorway of the log tavern, while nine-year-old Nancy stood beneath him with strings, a hammer and some sharp wooden pegs to use as nails.

"I think having vines all over houses is like wearing Sunday clothes that don't cost

nothing," remarked young Nancy with dancing eyes, as she reached up a peg and the hammer to her victim, who was steadying himself against the cedar post on which the sign "Log-Tavern" hung. "I 'm going to bring you some camphor and bear grease ointment to rub your back with, Mr. Haskins. Mother let me make it myself," Nancy tendered in a spirit of fair trade.

"Is the grease outen that bear Tom Lincoln shot last fall, when it was making off with Brother Haskins' heifer calf?" asked the Circuit Rider with interest, for Tom's exploit with the big brown marauder at twenty paces, a last load in his old flint-lock and with a damp powder-horn, had been the epic of the rush-bottom-chair hunters' conclaves for the entire past winter.

"Naw, Nancy hev rubbed all the grease outen that bear on Tom's hair this winter fer singin' school, and then it has looked like a wore-out twig broom at that," Mr.

Haskins answered as he pounded in the peg for the confining of the trumpeter.

"Last Sunday night at meeting Tom's head was slick enough for a fly to slip up to his death on. I testify to that myself," the Circuit Rider hastened to say as he saw a retort forming itself within Nancy which might upset the trainer of the vines, for the purple eyes were emitting flashes from back of their black defenses that Elder Head and Brother Haskins both knew to forerun a storm. "Tom has got a great power in his voice when he sings Rock of Ages with you helping him, Nancy."

"Tom kinder got tangled in his tune when he tried to sing outen the same book with Sallie Bush at night services, her in that dimity her father had brung all the way from Philadelphia on mule pack," Mr. Haskins observed as he drove the last peg and tied the last string. "What about Tom and Sallie, Nancy?"

"Oh, I think Sallie is jest beautiful in that dress and I 'll let her sing with Tom all she wants to," answered Nancy with feminine rapture over the beautiful Sallie and her apparel, thus evincing a generosity which was most unfeminine. The heart of nine years is usually as generous and sexless as that of a white-feathered cherub.

It is to the credit of the tenderness in the rough pioneer's heart that he winked at the butternut-breeched divine under his roof tree, and desisted in any attempt to make a jealous rift in the lute of the small cherub to whom he handed the hammer and nails.

"Well, if you keep Tom greased up well, I reckon Sallie will be proper grateful to you, Nancy; bear-greased hair is a good courting aid," he observed with another wink. "Any more jobs you want to put on my poor back?"

"No, thank you, sir," answered Nancy with a sudden resolve beginning to burn in

her purple eyes. "What else is good aids on courting a beautiful young lady, Mr. Haskins?"

"Waal, now, how about clean hands and neck and ears and shirt, Brother Head?" Mr. Haskins consulted the elder with great gravity.

"Well said, Brother Haskins, well said," assented Elder Head with a well-concealed smile tugging at his lips, under his white beard.

"Say, Mr. Haskins, I 've got to get home quick, as it 's 'most sundown, but I 'm going to send Runt back with that camphor and bear grease for your back. I 'll send a piece of mother's old flannel petticoat to rub it on hot, and Runt will help you as you ain't married," Nancy said as she took her departure with an intention for action written all over her small person.

"I suspect that poor Tom Lincoln is in for a bodily regeneration," remarked Elder

Head as Brother Haskins took a rush-bottomed chair beside his guest and tilted himself against the log wall for the recuperation of his powers after his decorative efforts.

"That Nancy Hanks is one of these here pretty pink garden roses with a two-horse power buzz-saw for a center," remarked Mr. Haskins, as he rubbed his back with one hand and looked after the little blue homespun figure disappearing down the road towards the Hanks home, which had grown from the one-room log cabin into which Mother Hanks had arrived from the Wilderness, to a pretentious mass of log rooms all covered by one low clapboard roof under whose eaves doves were nesting in the trumpet vines and wood-creeper. "She have got this whole town roped and thrown where she can set on it, Nancy has."

"Nancy uses her heart-strings for ropes, Brother Haskins; that 's why they hold. Heart strings bind a friend like an iron

band," the elder mused as his eyes also followed the retreating blue figure, which was disappearing in a cloud of dust raised by the fleet bare feet that bore Nancy rapidly on her mission.

"True," answered Brother Haskins, and reached for his tobacco twist.

The sun was just sinking behind the treetops as Nancy darted past the house and over to the Hanks carpenter shop, which stood in a clump of tall oaks beside the creek across the clearing. On her way she passed her brother, broad Jo Hanks, going in from his work with his leather apron still strapped to his waist. He made a grab for the fleeing small girl, caught her, swung her above his head, kissed her, spanked her and released her.

"Oh, Jo, can I get Tom now?" she demanded rather than requested.

"Tom 's finishin' off a piggin for Mrs. Hendricks and you 'd better let him be, for

the old lady gets het up if she 's crossed."

"I 'll take it home to her if it 's finished late, and she won't say nothing but give me a tea cake outen the box if I catch her round the waist from behind 'fore she knows I 'm there and skeer her." Nancy planned with the assurance of long experience with her peppery neighbor.

"Say, Nancy, don't you ever try to sneak up on the devil that way, on account of his forked tail," laughed big Jo, carefully edging one of his huge bare feet over one of Nancy's small toes which was adorned with a dusty pink rag, and for his pains failed to receive the alarmed wiggle for which he was working. Nancy Hanks was filled with a certainty that her small world intended her no hurt, and could not be frightened with any threat.

"What do you want with Tom now?" he asked, as he ruffled her bronze hair.

"I want to fix him up pretty before singing school tonight. It won't be more than two hours, and please let me have him now, Jo," pleaded Nancy.

"If you expect to make Tom pretty in any two hours, sissy, get to doin' it," laughed Jo, as he went on his way and Nancy flew on hers.

The last rays of the departing sun were falling across Tom Lincoln as Nancy entered the shop, and he lifted his head from the drawing knife with which he was making pink cedar shavings curl off the rounded sides of the piggin, to smile at her with a gravity that made the smile seem a very personal gift. In the years that had passed since wee Nancy had been lowered into his arms and life, Tom had grown from a loose-jointed awkward boy into a very tall, strong youth, still awkward but powerful as any man. His hands and feet were enormous and his chest was arched like a bellows. His

head was broad-browed and fine, and was poised with an uncouth grace on a long neck from which his sweaty brown hickory shirt fell back half way down his hairy breast. His leathern apron was girded about his slender, lithe waist and his serious face was smudged with dirt and sweat. His thick black hair rose in a shock that defied the ministrations lavished on it by Nancy since the time of the sacrifice of the brown bear. His eyes lost their smile and regarded Nancy seriously as he began to run his huge skilled hand over the surface he was polishing.

"What you want, honey bird? I 'm busy," he said.

"Joe says you can stop work and come right with me, Tom," Nancy both cajoled and commanded.

"Jo Hanks ain't makin' this piggin, and I gave my own promise to Mrs. Hendricks. A promise is a promise. What do you want

of me anyway? Can't you let me be, Nancy?" Tom began with defiance and ended with a faltering plea to continue his business in hand.

"This is singing school night and I want to—that is you oughter fix up, Tom." Nancy had begun her answer with direct enthusiasm for her task, but had paused midway to inject what she considered the necessary amount of cajoling.

"Oh, shoo, I can do that in ten minutes after I eat my supper," Tom answered, as he began once more to make the pink curls fall to the floor.

"No, you can't, Tom," Nancy declared. "You are just awful and—and I 'm going to fix you up myself. I just love that Miss Sallie Bush, and I want you clean and nice to sing with her. Please, Tom."

Did not the love in Nancy's child heart for Sallie Bush but justly bear interest in the older girl's faithful cherishing of the

National Treasure she was to leave in her hands years later?

"I 'm no baby. I guess I can wash and comb myself," Tom growled while his big ears grew firey red at the bare mention of the enchanting Sallie.

Now Nancy Hanks had two tried and proven ways to manage Thomas Lincoln, and in her heart of hearts she preferred the exciting, commanding one by which she fairly stormed him into doing her will: but time and daylight were scarce on this occasion, and she used the other method, which she knew to be more swift and sure.

"I just ask you please, please, Tom, and you don't want me to cry, do you?" The little tremor that Nancy, aged nine and six months, threw into her voice, was worthy of twenty years' practice. "Gus Hardin greases his boots until they shine for singing school and Jo puts on a white shirt, and Dave Hall's mother has made him a red silk

sash to put around his neck, that he calls a tie. I don't want to be ashamed of you, Tom."

"Oh, blame it, Nancy, what do you want me to do?" Tom growled as he threw down his knife and surrendered.

"Go straight home, Tom, and I 'll come down to your pump with the things to fix you," Nancy commanded, with joy at her quick triumph dancing up into her eyes. "Oh, you 'll be sure enough beautiful," and with which promise, indicating the strength of her imagination, Nancy departed as Tom began to take off his apron, preparatory to closing up shop.

The scene that followed at the pump in the backyard of the Lincoln home is indicative of how life was to use Thomas Lincoln, preparing a ceremony of honors for him which he was not to reap.

Who shall say what burned high in his strong young heart as he walked down the

dusty road, to be adorned for the meeting with the beautiful one in the mule-transported dimity, who had made his voice falter in its devotions. Nancy's will and Nancy's imagination had always impressed themselves upon his own will and his own imagination, and if Nancy had decided that he was to be beautiful for the pleasing of the beautiful Sallie, he never doubted that he would meet the emergency. His heart sang high.

He found Nancy waiting for him at the tryst with her instruments of magic all at hand, spread out on a bench beside her. They were: a pair of huge scissors, a large gourd of soft lye soap, a rough towel, Jo Hanks' slender bladed pocket knife and a small deer horn full of the precious bear grease, beside which lay a comb and a roll of flannel for straightening and polishing the black hair. Also her father's razor was near at hand, with a nice

foam of lather rubbed into a wooden saucer.

"Shave first," commanded Nancy, as he came to a halt beside her.

"Do I have to?"

"Yes, you do. The other boys don't, but your face scratches awful and ain't pretty," was the decided answer.

The process was laborious and Nancy began to watch the lengthening shadows in fear of not enough daylight for her undertakings. They did extend themselves nearly into the candle light; for they were many.

The shaving accomplished, Nancy attacked the sunbrowned face and excavated deep into the flaming ears with the rough towel. She clipped the black shock of hair, greased it lavishly and finally polished it with the flannel until it shone like old mahogany. She scoured the large hands and arms, and even pared and dug around the rough nails, while Tom sat fairly patient

and with only slight remonstrances in the shapes of groans and petitions.

"Just being clean ain't a pain, Tom," Nancy soothed as she dug with the sharp blade under a thumb nail that was dark with native soil.

"It 's all foolishness," Tom answered as the deft little fingers began an assault on his other huge paw.

"When you put on what I 've got in the wood shed, while I grease up your boots like Gus', you 'll be just wonderful, Tom," Nancy persuaded as she finished wielding her knife and gave a last polish to the mahogany head.

"Oh, Lordy, what you going to make me do now?" groaned the martyr to the romance in young Nancy's breast.

"It 's a white shirt mother let me spin and weave for you, Tom, all last winter. I made it by Jo and it is a present for you. I was going to bleach it two more times be-

fore you saw it, but you can wear it tonight, and I 'll put it out in the dew and sun again after I wash it," answered Nancy as her eyes danced with the joy of bestowing the gift, which was the work of art that had occupied her entire winter's spare moments, and upon which she had obtained her education at the wheel of pioneer feminine power.

"Shoo, Nancy, I ain't fitten to wear your white shirt. Better give it to Uncle Jo." Tom's face was illumined with both embarrassment and great gratitude.

"I made it for you, Tom, 'cause I 'm all the mother you 've got to weave you white shirts, and I want you to wear it to please Miss Sallie at singing. You must, Tom." Small Nancy pleaded for the white shirt, pleasure for herself, and the radiant Sallie in all sincerity.

"All right, Nancy, I 'll do it and thank you too," Thomas graciously consented. "Is it in the wood house, you say?"

"Yes, wrapped in a clean towel, and put it right on while I get the boots greased as good as Gus'," Nancy commanded, as she took up one of the huge rawhide boxes that Thomas wore upon his wide feet on strictly gala occasions, and began the humble office of greasing them with the fat of the murdered bear.

"My feet don't show when I sing. Shoes kinder crowd me," Tom pleaded.

"It don't look right to be dressed up at one end and not the other," Nancy decided sternly, as she went on with her polishing. "Go on, Tom."

And Tom went.

CHAPTER IV

IN her management of Tom, Nancy Hanks evinced the force of a strong personality. Thomas Lincoln yielded to few people, for he had a force of his own, and showed it when occasion demanded. He cared little and consorted less with the boys of his own age; he liked best to sit and listen, silently, and intently, to the talk of the older men, though his expert knowledge on the food and fur questions often made him one of the council, and forced upon him a voice therein. He was accustomed to speak out whatever he thought, when forced to speak, and his opinion and decisions were often so shrewd and well balanced that the men listened to him and did him the honor

to argue with him heatedly, when he opposed their decisions. Under his slow-speaking, awkward exterior there were banked fires that when stirred emitted tongues of scathing flame. He was respected far beyond his years and disliked far beyond his deserts, which made him a conspicuous personality. What Tom Lincoln did and said was always the news of the day. And at all times his huge, ungainly appearance was the target of good-natured fun.

"Tom is so ugly that you shet your eyes before your nose or ears get wind of him," his brother Mordecai was in the habit of remarking with no particular care that Tom should not hear him.

And it so happened that the critical Mordecai was on hand to watch Tom's appearance from the wood house in the full glory of the results of all young Nancy's efforts on him, in the interest of the adored Miss Sallie Bush, which was unfortunate because Nancy

really deserved at least a few moments of unalloyed delight over her handiwork.

There he stood before her with his sleek hair and red and polished face of sheepish expression undergirded by the collar of the first white shirt he had ever had upon his broad back. It was tucked trimly into the butternut homespun breeches which were in turn tucked into the resplendent greased boots, and the total was such that Nancy clasped her small hands, begrimed with their ministrations, to her young bosom swelling with pride, and was about to give vent to a feminine cry of rapture over her ugly duckling, when a huge roar went up from the throat of Mordecai as he lounged to the back door of the house.

"Well, will you look at Solomon in all his glory not arrayed like one of Tom," he laughed, with ridicule in every tone of his voice. "Is it the King of England or jest the President of the States?"

At the guffaw Susan appeared at the door and added a treble to Mordecai's bass derision.

In the twinkling of his elder brother's keen eye, Thomas' glory fell from him and he was covered with a furious awkwardness which was about to express itself in no uncertain terms of rage, when Nancy's anger beat him to the goal.

"If Tom or anybody was as ugly as your insides, Mordecai Lincoln, it would kill 'em dead." The young idealist, capable of laboring to materialize a dream of splendor, and putting herself under its glamour when obtained, fairly hurled at the big, slouching, figure in the doorway. "You 're an old dirty dog and don't ever speak to me again!"

"No, nobody must laugh at Nancy's pretty boy," Susan rubbed in on the raw.

"Oh—oho—" wailed the young artist, putting her head down onto the little arm, all

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tired out, and smudged with her labor of love and fairly trembling with rage.

Nancy Hanks being abused was a clarion call to Thomas Lincoln.

With a deep rage on his serious face and his large black eyes in a flame, he picked up a piece of stove wood that lay at his feet and hurled it straight and murderously at his brother's head. And if there had not been the interposition of a faithful little black shoulder and arm, Thomas Lincoln would have been a fratricide and probably hanged high on a tree, so altering the course of American History.

But little Runt, the woodsman, was quick on the trigger as he sprang between the embattled brothers.

"Are you dead, Runt?" wailed Nancy as she flew to the huddled black body, which fell at the feet of Mordecai and Susan, who both stood aghast at what might have happened, rather than what had happened.

"Yassum, but Mars Tom did n't kill Mars Mort," wailed the tortured little captive crow with his arm hanging limp and his shoulder dragging. Then he fainted away and failed to hear the emancipation proclamation issued over his unconscious body.

Slowly, like one in a dream, Thomas Lincoln walked across and stood over Nancy Hanks as she crouched beside the stricken negro, and looking his brother full in the face, said:

"Runt saved your life and me from murder, and I name him a free boy this day."

The declaration hit Mordecai Lincoln full in his brain like a physical thud and he staggered.

"Don't say that, Tom," he almost entreated, as his hand went up as if to protect himself from a further blow. "Don't let anybody hear you say that, Tom. You can't free niggers in Kentucky."

"Live or die Runt is free," Tom answered

calmly and his eyes were so full of a strange fire that Nancy looked up at him in awe with her small hand pressed over her hot little heart under her home-spun apron. Mardecai stood silent in a like awe while Susan slunk away out the front door and down the road, bent on getting out of the situation and relating it as quickly as possible to Tom's discredit.

Thus Thomas Lincoln became, probably, the first active Kentucky abolitionist, an honor for which he was to pay a bitter price; and Nancy Hanks looked up at his assumption of that fate, for which she too was to pay a price, with glowing eyes.

"Shoo, Tom, pick him up and carry him to his mammy's cabin and I 'll have the half-breed Injun doctor fix him when he comes to look over the sick heifer tonight," Mordecai commanded as he came to himself.

"I wisht that chunk of wood had knocked your head clean off instead of Runt, and I

hope you die anyway," Nancy raged at Mordecai as she departed with Tom, who carried the moaning little negro tenderly, while Nancy supported his bare black feet against her sorrowing little white bosom.

"Don't you grieve, Mars Tom, Runt will be a-stealin' jam by sun up tomorrow," old Jude, the mother comforted, as Tom laid the Runt on her feather bed under its gay patched quilt.

"Come home with me, Tom," Nancy commanded as they turned away from the negro cabin door. "I can't stand for Mordecai to mad you any more."

"Lem 'me go to the woods, Nancy," answered Thomas with a dull ache in his voice and eyes.

"But I want you to come with me to keep me from crying," Nancy wooed with the threatened tears in her big purple eyes, which glinted in the dusk that had come down on the hot earth while it had been the

scene of the equally hot anger. "And I want my mother to see how good you look." A sob almost choked the last demand.

"All right, honey bird," Tom answered promptly, covering his wound, which he longed to go away and lick, to soothe his champion.

The mother of Nancy Hanks was a very wise and winsome woman, who had been reared on broad Virginia acres and fostered in all gentleness, and she knew how to use her charm to straighten out the many tangles of pioneer existence to which she was unaccustomed, but which she bore with courage for love of big Joseph Hanks.

Her enthusiastic admiration of Thomas in party array went far towards toning down the red of his big clean ears, bring up his hanging head and restoring the curl and dimples to Nancy's red mouth.

"You 'll have to do a power of titivating yourself, Nancy, if you are expecting to go

to the singing with Thomas and me," she said after she had listened to the whole story and smoothed the ragged surfaces of Nancy's and Thomas' nervous system. "I 've got on my lace collar and I 've made me fresh water waves."

The sweet face under the little fluffy white wave-curls smiled tenderly as she called the attention of the two hurt children to her own adornment for their distraction. Her dainty, high-bred beauty must have struck a very deep note in the shy awkward boy, for he laid a long arm around her slender shoulders and hugged her close against the new white shirt. Then he looked at her as if in surprise, and there was a note of concern in his big rich voice as he spoke.

"Aunt Nancy, you ain't got any more heft on you than a willow switch," he said as he held her from him and looked at her. "Don't your victuals meat you up none?"

"Hush, Tom," answered Mother Hanks

as she gave a quick love glance at big Joseph coming across the front yard to the porch. "I 'm all right and I don't want Joseph worried."

Delicately nurtured Nancy Shipley, who had followed her husband into the Wilderness, was about to pay the price of her life for her adventure, which price many other splendid Virginia women paid, for the building of Kentucky. She knew it but hid the fact in all tenderness. As her husband came into the room she went into his arms and clung to him in such a way as to get her lips near his ear.

"Make a compliment to Tom about his looks," she whispered.

"Why, Tom Lincoln, you look as big and upstanding as your grandfather, old Mister Abraham Lincoln," Uncle Jo declared with a genuine heartiness in his face and voice, which made his wife give him an extra pressure of her tender arms as she drew away

from him. The praise from his beloved Uncle Jo immediately put poor Tom's pride back upon its pedestal, though he smiled in embarrassment and turned to Nancy, whose eyes were dancing with delight at her father's pronouncement.

"Want me to comb out your pig tails and plate 'em, Nancy?" he offered heroically, for the combing and plating of Nancy's long braids was a task dreaded by the whole family connection because of the soft fluff of the red-brown locks which made for agonizing tangles.

"Yes, comb her, Tom, while I fix up Joseph," answered Mother Hanks busily. "Elder Head is here, Joseph, and we are going to have prayer meeting and a love feast after the singing."

"Say, Tom, men are just doll babies for women folks to dress up," was all the protest big Joseph made, as he followed Mother Hanks into his bedroom.

The reciprocal grooming which Thomas bestowed on Nancy was an easier task than usual, for Nancy realized that time was flying, and that she must stand with a certain amount of tranquillity, while the big hands performed the painful ceremony of unplating, untangling and replating. She realized that haste must be made if she was to be fittingly adorned in the little homespun frock, which had been dyed with polk juice, the pink of an autumn sunset and which had in its neck and sleeves a ruffle of fine white Virginia linen, in time to be of the party at the singing.

As it was, she and Tom were delayed by a search for one of the small rawhide shoes, that she was forced to ease over the pink bandaged toe, and which was at last found in the shop where Tom had been pegging a gap in its flat sole the day before.

"Everybody 's gone in the church, Tom, but I know none of the other boys have got

the place by Miss Sallie away from you," Nancy gasped as she trotted three steps to Tom's long one down the road beside him, her hand in his.

"Shoo," answered Thomas with an indifference he was far from feeling, for the hot blood of stirring adolescent love was burning in his cheeks—and also in his sensitive ears.

Of all the desires that had moved the heart of Thomas Lincoln up to that moment the strongest was for the seat beside the mule-imported sprigged muslin and the right to hold the corner of the wearer's square old singing book. And this was to be the night on which he was to put his fate to the touch. He knew that the whole settlement had been nudging its elbows and smiling at the fact that Tom Lincoln was "noticing" Sallie Bush, and Nancy had succeeded in convincing him that his adornment had made sure of the conquest.

Thus it was with the confidence of a con-

queror, Thomas Lincoln entered the church with Nancy beside him, though she almost immediately turned away from him and made her way to a bench beside her mother, directly opposite the left corner of the log room in which the singers usually occupied all the seats.

And then it happened.

Nancy was just preparing to seat herself beside her mother, turning first to observe the tall figure of the swan, who had been her ugly duckling, stride up the aisle and take the place coveted by every boy in the settlement, which she was sure would be reserved for him, when she stood stock still with dismay.

Things had gone wrong.

The entire population of the settlement was seated, ready for the elder to rise and line out the first hymn, in which they were to be led by the choir, a dozen young people seated in the left "Amen corner," and their

eyes were fixed upon that spot to witness the fact that when Thomas Lincoln, in all his glory, arrived to culminate his "noticing" of Sallie Bush, his divinity failed to sweep aside her skirts of mule-imported muslin and offer him the desired corner of her book, but gave a little hitch of one shoulder and a fluff of the skirts, which clearly indicated that if Thomas was to sit in the singers' corner it would have to be alone on a long front bench. And in the midst of a tittering silence, Thomas subsided upon the corner of the empty seat, alone, facing an audience before which in a second he would have to rise and sing.

But the world was never to reckon Thomas Lincoln without adding Nancy Hanks to his sum total. When Thomas faced his world in abashment, Lincoln Settlement's most prominent citizen, young Nancy Hanks, stood beside him, singing away for dear life in a full bird voice from

her mother's huge hymn book, the corner of which Thomas held. And the withering glance bestowed upon the faithless friend from the big violet eyes held all the tragedy of a betrayed hero-worshipper.

Great as was the humiliation of this public flaunting to Thomas Lincoln, it was when he heard the cause that the iron entered his soul, which hardened him to an opinion and a purpose with which he lived and died. It was not until the singing, in which his rich deep voice blended with Nancy's bird-like flute to the shaming of the rest of the singers, including the small but tuneful twitter that rose from beneath the tucker of Miss Sallie's sprigged dimity, was over, the scriptures read, and the prayers offered that Thomas learned the cause of his humiliation.

According to his custom of monthly meetings in the Settlement, Elder Head concluded his services with what Methodism called at that date and down the future, a

Love Feast. A ceremony at which brother and sister were expected to speak up and accuse and forgive brother and sister. Naturally the service was at all times attended with no small excitement, but upon this occasion there was plainly a weighty matter to be threshed out. And though he was ignorant of it, upon the shoulders of Thomas Lincoln the flail of public opinion was to fall.

"And now, brothers and sisters, I invite you to speak what is in your heart one for another, in all neighborly feeling among followers of our Lord." Brother Head gave the invitation with anxiety in his gentle face.

Immediately Susan Lincoln rose from beside her husband, though his hand had been laid out to restrain her.

"I wish the reproof of this congregation upon Thomas Lincoln fer the rage what led him to free a nigger," the rough and vindic-

tive woman drawled out with more than rage, positive fury, flaming in her own red face. A murmur of consternation came from the majority of the settlers, who thus for the first time were hearing that the dread and awful act, abolition, had been committed in their community. However, the knowing and contemptuous smile on the face of Sallie Bush, the rest of the singers and a few others of the congregation showed that Susan had been about her malicious business in the several hours that had elapsed between the emancipation of the Runt and the gathering of the congregation.

"Free a nigger! Poor Tom!" Sallie whispered with a contemptuous giggle to Gus Harding, who had slipped into the coveted place beside her, when he had beheld her flouting of Tom. Mr. Bush was the largest slave holder in the settlement and he sat glaring at Tom from half way back in the church.

"That white shirt hit him loony," answered Gus with a suppressed guffaw that died away as the elder turned and looked past Thomas, the abolitionist, to Mordecai, the head of the family, for an answer to the charge against this minor member.

"Jest git after Tom for his temper, Elder! That ain't nothing to the nigger freeing business," Mordecai answered with easy unconcern.

He should have known Thomas Lincoln better.

Tom rose to his feet in all his unaccustomed finery and faced the keen eyes fixed on him, which were unfriendly and fierce because of his materialization of a dread, which was to mature in the future to take from them property honestly acquired, but which they all held with uneasy consciences.

Then Thomas Lincoln made his crude speech, which was to become coherent years later at Gettysburg.

"I beg Mort's pardon for the temper, Elder, but Runt is free and is going ter stay that way. I hold it is a sin to slave any human critter." With which proclamation Tom brought down upon himself a storm of protest. And as he stood before them all, in his hand had rested the hand of small Nancy Hanks, while around the two raged a roaring sea of argument, accusation, refutation, protest and vilification.

But Elder Jesse Head had survived many serious "love feasts," in which property rights, connubial rights and the subject of infant damnation had been threshed out, and he knew when to pour oil on the troubled waters.

"Well, brethren and sisters, we 'll leave this whole matter to the Lord and commend prayerful consideration of it to those mostly concerned," he declaimed, a formula tried many times successfully. "Let us receive the benediction."

"AND NOW MAY THE GRACE OF GOD BE WITH US AND GUIDE US THIS DAY FOR THE SAKE OF JESUS CHRIST. AMEN!"

And the men and women who stood with bent heads to receive that benediction, filed out with dark glances of condemnation at Thomas Lincoln, as he walked among them, hand in hand with Nancy Hanks.

Down the road the boy, who had made himself a pariah and the child who loved him, walked silently in the starlight. "Git to bed, Nancy," Tom commanded at the Hanks gate, as he put her from him when she would have clung; and he walked away from her across the road and into the sanctuary of the great forest.

An hour later when big Joseph Hanks was about to extinguish the last candle in the log house, he heard a sound of weeping from the corner where Nancy slept. Since the savages had almost stolen her from him,

he always took a last look at the dark head on the pillow before going to his rest, and he set down the candle and bent over her as he heard the smothered sobs.

"What is it, sweetling?" he asked tenderly.

"Tom! Oh, go git Tom! He 's gone into the woods," was the wailing answer.

"Tom kin take keer of himself in any woods," big Joseph answered with comforting assurance.

"I want him to stay in this house always, so nobody will dare to talk ugly to him. Go git him, Daddy."

"Yes, we 'll have to take Tom now, Joe," Mother Hanks said as she came to the bedside and put her thin cheek down against Nancy's hot little face. "He can't live with Susan and Mort after this."

"Well, can't I adopt Tom Lincoln before breakfast tomorrow morning and go to sleep now, Nancy?" asked Joseph with a smile of ready consent at the petition of his two be-

loved women for protection for the young abolitionist.

"Yes," faltered Nancy, content for the moment with the promise of her father's guardianship for her unfortunate.

Then while darkness and sleep settled down upon the Lincoln Settlement, out in the dark forest Thomas Lincoln lay with his face pressed to the bosom of the land he was helping to conquer, and he was drenching the soil with as bitter tears as had been or ever would be shed upon its richness. Part of the hurt was the loss of the promise of budding love, a glimpse of which he had caught in the eyes of the young pioneer girl, and the agony of it ached with the pulse of the blood in the veins of his huge, strong, man-boy body, but in his soul there burned a fiercer fire, the conflagration that is always raised by injustice. The conviction of the inherent right to human freedom, which had caught fire at a spark struck out by small Nancy

beside the captive poults, in whose condition she had seen a likeness to her own savage trapping and tying, had grown with his growth until it had become to him an obligation for which he must be willing to suffer. The dramatic freeing of the Runt had been but the hasty culmination of an intention which he had been cherishing and for which he had been biding the time of his own more powerful and commanding manhood. And yet what was to bring order in the chaos of his immature boy's heart and mind? All the men of power in his small world owned slaves and were eagerly buying more, for upon their labor was being rapidly built a great Commonwealth. Who was he to stand up alone and call them to account? Where could he get the strength to withstand their anger, scorn and derision? Would he have always to face the black looks that had been cast at him that night, which was to have been the occasion of his love triumph?

"Sallie and everybody 'll hate me now," he sobbed under his breath as he pressed his ugly face into the dust.

"Not me, Tom," came a soft answer to his wail out of the leaf-shadowed darkness, and Nancy huddled down beside him with her cheek pressed upon the bear-greased hair on the back of his head. "I love you, an' all the rest of the mean folks don't make any difference at all. If we want to turn things aloose we 'll do it."

The results of that pact were far reaching.

CHAPTER V

THE small epidemic of abolition fever ran its course in Lincoln Settlement very true to its national type. After the high temperature of public opinion over Thomas Lincoln's freeing of the Runt had reached its culminating scene in the love feast, the very next day things became more normal, though there was still bad blood evidenced for the champion of freedom. The men of the Settlement met the sullen boy with averted eye or sneering glances, and the women of their households followed their example, with only added hurts. For a number of days Sallie Bush passed the young carpenter by with only a swish of her skirts, but eventually she came home to supper with Betsy Hanks, about ten days after the tragedy, and was ingenuous enough

to inquire for Tom, when he failed to put in his appearance at the evening repast of his new home. He was represented, however, by wild turkey, grape jelly, walnut pickle and Nancy.

"Is n't Tom Lincoln living with you now, Mrs. Hanks?" Sallie had asked as she seated herself by tall William Hanks, while Elizabeth Hull, whom William was industriously "noticing," eyed her askance from a seat beside big Joseph. Tom on his adoption into the Hanks family had been given the chair beside sweet Mother Hanks, and upon that particularly festive occasion it was noticeably empty. Next to the vacant seat stood young Nancy, and as the fallen idol made her inquiry, the youngest member of the Hanks family finished piling two plates high with all the most choice food on the table, added a huge dab of well nigh all the jelly and stood poised for departure. But before she went she thus delivered herself:

"Me and Tom likes to eat together out in the woods when folks we don't like is visiting us," with which she swept from the log room with her stately little head poised so high that she was in danger of falling over backwards.

"Switch tea is the only medicine that would do her any good," remarked William Hanks, in a temper over this insult to the young lady visiting at the hospitable parental board.

"The tree ain't planted yet that 'll grow a switch for my Nancy," laughed Nancy's father.

"She 'll come back presently and make her manners," Mother Hanks promised with an apologetic tone of voice, but a twinkle in her eyes that matched her husband's laugh.

However, Nancy did not return and make her apologies. She was engaged in witnessing a scene of a great sentiment,

which has made its impression on the American national character and institutions.

The Runt had got away from maternal authority and had come hunting for Tom like a dog for its master. His shoulder was in a rude splint and a white rag encircled his bullet head. He flung himself out of the woods, and at Tom and Nancy's feet, as they sat astride a log with the two high-piled plates between them.

"Miss Susie said I must n't come ter you, Marse Tom, 'cause you had done give me away," he panted. "But I broke aloose and come a-running. Oh, Marse Tom, say I 'm your nigger and you ain't flung me away." The pleading on the poor little crow's face was an agony.

"I did n't give you away, Runt, I freed you," Tom answered with affection fairly shining in his solemn eyes.

"Don't say that, Marse Tom, don't say that!" pleaded the Runt, dropping on his

knees before the abolitionist, who had given him a man's most precious possession. "What 's a nigger going to do that don't belong to nobody?"

The question asked by the Runt in agony, rose from hundreds of thousands of black throats after July fourth, eighteen sixty-two, and its echo has not entirely died away even unto this day.

The question was up to Thomas Lincoln and it staggered him. However, Nancy Hanks had the same solution ready to offer that was used by the women of the Confederacy when they were left with helpless freedmen to feed and control while the men of their family fought over their destinies.

"You go right on working, and trade work for what you need," Nancy said, as she picked up a broad plantin leaf and put a generous dinner from her own plate and Tom's upon it, for the sustaining of the new-fledged freedman. Her Southern feminine

posterity promptly gave the liberated slaves an acre and a mule with which to work, and shared the crops thus produced, so instituting an economic system which holds in the South even unto this day. The men who had fought with conviction of right to hold their slaves, returned to find that their women had harnessed the freedmen to plows to the interest of everybody concerned.

"Go working in the woods jest the same?" questioned the Runt with relief in his big black eyes.

"Jest the same," ratified Tom, as he rose and stretched his long arms as Nancy handed the dinner to the Runt, who squatted down on his big heels to consume it.

But the fate of the Runt was not that easily settled, and it hung a dark cloud on the horizon of the fate of Thomas Lincoln. On the surface things went on as before, Runt living in his mother's cabin and working as before, but the matter was not ended

—it was to be the crisis of Thomas Lincoln's life history.

The summer that Tom lived under the Hanks roof with Mother Hanks and Nancy, his chief friend, though the Hanks boys were friendly and big Joseph always kind, was perhaps the most constructive period of his life. His own crude ideals became crystallized and he found new ones.

When the crisp autumn days came, he worked hard at the shop until the light failed, then he would tramp off into the woods to bring in wild grapes for the jelly, nuts for curing and herbs for drying. In the long evenings he boiled down to sugar the syrup he had got from tapping the maple trees in the spring in the wide fireplace in which it was pleasant to have a brisk fire. William and Jo and the girls often went down to the Log Tavern for singing, and the dancing of Virginia reels, while ap-

ples were roasted and corn popped, but Tom always stayed at home with Nancy and Mother Hanks, and the quiet evenings were very precious to him.

As the brilliant autumn days began to vanish earlier and earlier over the tree tops, from which winter was gradually stealing the mantles of gold and crimson and brown, and the frosty nights grew longer, sweet Mother Hanks drew into the chimney corner and kept her little homespun wool shawl wrapped closer about her thin shoulders. Opposite her sat big Joseph, in his heart of hearts grieving over her failing strength, but keeping up his courage even to himself. Before the hearth Nancy and Tom carried on various winter activities, from the sugar boilings and the sorting and laying away of garden and field seeds to Nancy's spinning, for which Tom carded the wool and cotton.

Then when the work was well in hand,

Tom would reach up for a large candle, light it, set it on a table by Mother Hanks and make his nightly plea:

"Read, Aunt Nancy, read!"

And to the boy and girl, who were some day to form the mould from which was cast the foremost American, the frail pioneer woman would read from the few volumes that she had brought from Virginia. "Pilgrim's Progress" delighted Nancy and a precious "Æsop's Fables" was a continuous source of pleasure to big Joseph Hanks, but Tom never tired of the "Psalms of David," and he always wanted the story of the deliverance of the Israelites out of Egypt. As he stirred and dipped and poured the golden mass of maple juice from kettle to kettle and back again, his dark eyes would glow in the firelight as the gentle voice read on through the stirring story from the Lord's proclamation to Moses:

"I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered my covenant—and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage—"

through the long wandering of the freedman to the Divine command:

"Moses my servant is dead, now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all thy people, unto the land which I do give to them."

"A mighty story, a mighty story," big Joseph would comment between puffs from his corn cob pipe. "That Moses led a whole nation of people to freedom. Seems a pity he could n't go into the promised land with 'em and get some of the credit."

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"But he started 'em, he started 'em," Thomas would mutter as he poured a spoonful of the golden and thickening syrup on a cedar chip and passed it up for Nancy's judgment as to its sugaring off.

The story of Moses planted in the heart of Thomas Lincoln was to bear its fruit down the ages.

Then during some of the long evenings big Joseph would hold forth, and the thing that most interested both Tom and Nancy were his tales of what their families had done "back in Virginia and still beyont."

The favorite story of Nancy was of the participation of one of Tom's ancestors, Captain Ockley Lincoln, in the Boston Tea Party.

"And did they jest up and throw all that tea away into the water because they wanted to be free of England, Daddy?" she would ask with sparkling eyes, for energetic action always appealed to Nancy. "I reckon the

ocean tasted like tea for a week. I wisht he 'd been my antsister, Daddy, 'stead of Tom's!"

"Shoo, Nancy," Tom would answer as his kernels of corn popped into white fluffy balls, "I 'll trade him for them Hanks men what poured the iron fer the big Liberty Bell with it written on it 'Proclaim Liberty throughout all the land and unto all the inhabitants thereof.' "

"Now don't go and trade her your uncle Levi Lincoln, what the President appointed Associate Justice of the States, Tom. Your Grandpa Lincoln set great store by him and used to go visit him in Philadelphia. He was a Secretary of State oncet and helped make out the constitution to run Massachusetts by. Don't never trade your Uncle Levi away, Tom. He is a statesman and you must try to be one too." As he spoke Joseph Hanks smiled indulgently at the awkward, ignorant boy before him, who

seemed but a scion of the Lincolns gone to seed.

In the future his seed was to be the greatest of them all.

"I don't want his Uncle Levi, I want that soldier, Mister Lincoln, at Yorktown battle," Nancy answered, as she made her wheel whirl and spin as dexterously as ever her mother had done. "It was from him that the eagle, with the snake in his claws, got on Tom's father's powder horn. I like fighting, I do."

"His grandfather over in England had a red cross with a gold star in the middle of it worked on his uniform. You might work one on Tom's shirt for him, Nancy, when you ain't busy," big Joseph teased.

"You can have it to put on your bonnet, Nancy," Thomas said, as he stirred his popping corn and again dipped and poured the sugaring syrup from the ladle.

His hereditary red cross with a golden

star would have been a fitting emblem to blazon on the arm of poor Tom Lincoln, who had the right to them from his fathers and whose son would prove it a fitting insignia.

"Well, let 's don't make fun about our forefathers, but be thankful they were good and gallant gentlemen," Mother Hanks' soft voice rather mused than reproved. "Help me to bed, Joseph."

"Ain't Aunt Nancy getting weaker, Nancy?" Tom questioned with uneasiness in his large affectionate eyes that followed his Uncle Joseph's big frame as he bore his delicate wife into her bedroom.

"I don't know, is she, Tom?" Nancy questioned with fright in her eyes as she snapped her thread and let her wheel slow down.

"Hush, don't let on before Uncle Jo. He can't stand it," Tom cautioned as the burly pioneer came back into the room.

"S'posen you read us a Psalm, Nancy,"

said big father Joseph, who was always consumed with pride when he watched the dark red head bent over the big book and heard the sweet voice intone the excellent words of David, the singer.

Then came last nights for the little conclave around the fire. Big Joseph Hanks was not to be called upon to "stand" the loss of the wife of his bosom. In the late fall he was taken with a congestive chill from being too long out in the first and unexpected snow fall, and died in less than a week. All the while he was ill, Mother Hanks sat beside him with that quiet fortitude a courageous soul in a weak body often shows, and her hand clasped his firmly until it grew cold. She lived less than a month, for there are some hearts that are so closely knit that when either is amputated, the other bleeds to death; and their union is apt to produce such as Nancy Hanks and her progeny.

The night before the mother's going, she sent her two oldest girls and the boys from the room and drew her youngest child, Nancy, close against her pillow with her feeble arms.

"I don't know why, Nancy, but it is in my heart to say something to you that you won't understand now. It seems like a message and you must remember it. Love your man when you get one, hard, Nancy, and believe in him and follow him even to your death. A blessing will come of it. Remember!"

And Nancy remembered. The blessing which came was the heritage of a nation.

Snowflakes that were like bits of feathers from the wings of the archangels floated silently from the skies down through the stark branches of the great forest trees under which they buried sweet, brave, gentle Nancy Hanks beside the pioneer lover she had followed into the fastness of the great new Commonwealth on which her love was

to leave so deep a mark, and covered her grave with an immaculate pall.

That night there was a solemn and heart-broken conclave in the parentless Hanks home. Around the huge hearth was assembled the whole family and husky voices discussed what was best to do for the bereaved.

And as usual, good Richard Berry had the deciding voice.

"As Betsy is going to be joined in wedlock with Levi Hall so soon, and she wants to stay by him here, it will be best for Mordecai and Susan to give her shelter until that culmination," he adjudged thoughtfully.

"Welcome she 'll be, Uncle Berry," spoke up Mordecai promptly, with a sharp and commanding look at rough Susan, who this time rose to the occasion with less acidity than usual.

"She 'll be a power of help," the aunt agreed. "Aunt Nancy has made good spinners and weavers of her girls."

"And me and Thomas Sparrow have got a place in our home and hearts for Polly and Nancy," spoke up Elizabeth Sparrow quickly, as if to get in her claim before any other could be voiced.

"Polly, yes, Sister Sparrow, but—" at this point Richard Berry's big voice faltered and he held out his arms to Nancy, who sat crouched on the floor across the hearth from him with Tom Lincoln's arm around her and with her great eyes dark, brilliant with courageously controlled tears. Straight as an arrow she flew into the arms held out to her and as her beloved Uncle Berry clasped her close, gentle Lucy, his wife, bent and patted the gray and red heads pressed close together. She knew how far short his two rough boys had fallen in filling his paternal

heart, which had always yearned enviously over the Hanks treasure with her purple eyes and vigorous disposition.

"William and Jo and Tom can manage to make out with Susan and Betsy a-looking after 'em and they can keep on with the business," said Mordecai, making a decision in which the three Hanks boys acquiesced with nods of their head.

"Tom 's going with me," spoke up Nancy quickly, when she heard this mention of Tom as he sat silent in the shadow.

"Shoo, honey, we can't do without Tom, fer a while yit," big Mordecai hastened to say. "Tom, he 's the master shingler in the Settlement and they is six houses to roof in with snow flying already. You don't want nobody to freeze, do you?"

All of the family knew that the only appeal from her will that swayed young Nancy was one made to her sympathies, and they also knew that as she sat beside Uncle

Berry's knee her position was invincible and her dictums were not to be questioned.

"Granny Hendricks is mighty old to have a leaking roof in winter," Jo Hanks cautiously ventured into the conversation. All eyes were turned on Nancy as she decided the question of the present residence and activity of Thomas.

"I 'll let him stay this winter, but when leaves bloom out again, he 'll have to come where I am," Nancy decided thoughtfully. "You 'll come to me, Tom, won't you?"

"Yes, I 'll come after you," Tom promised, with relief written all over his somber face, for the removal into a strange community would have tried his bashful soul beyond measure. His ponderous imagination had not shown him a world devoid of Nancy. It was only dimly revealed to him the next day, when he put her down in the straw in the wagon bed in which she was to be sledded away from him through the great forest,

over whose white blanket of snow rested a gray veil of mist, lined with the black of the tree-trunks and boughs and twigs.

"Don't forget me, honey bird," he said, and then as Richard Berry stood up and cracked his whip over the backs of the two horses hitched to the sled, he put his rough cheek against hers and held her close.

"Never, Tom," she said quietly as she clutched at him for a second before the plunging horses tore her away from him.

It was well that neither Tom nor Nancy knew that their separation was to last a dozen years.

CHAPTER VI

IT was into a very different world from Lincoln Settlement that the steaming horses sledded ten-year-old Nancy Hanks. The decade that stretched from 1790 to 1800 was and remains one of the most potent in the annals of American History. A steady stream of settlers, with their huge wagons, flocks, herds and household goods, had poured across the Appalachian range into the Mississippi Valley, by a road that Nature had built of the bridle paths of the pioneers; and they had settled themselves around the outposts and stockades set up by the hardy pioneers from Boone to Robinson. In the caravans came skilled workmen from across the ocean, who began to build forges and make machinery for the clearing and cultivating of the broad acres. In 1790, less

than two hundred thousand pounds of cotton were exported from the States, which were at that time struggling one by one to ratify the Union that had been offered them, but in 1793 Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin in Georgia, and in 1800 America sent across the water nearly twenty million pounds. The South began to grow rich, even as it cleared its forests, and the whole Mississippi Valley teemed with energetic life.

The case of the little settlement at Pleasant Grove, which grew into Elizabethtown, was typical. When Nancy Hanks had come down the Wilderness Trail with her parents and uncles and aunts, the Berrys and Sparrows had left the Hankses and Lincolns in their cabins on Lincoln Creek, and gone deeper into the Dark and Bloody Ground. They had staked out their lands a few miles beyond Elizabethtown, which was at a crossing of the roads that were trav-

elled by the emigrants going into Tennessee and Ohio, and which had grown like the proverbial mushroom, far outdistancing the Lincoln Settlement.

As Nancy was sledded through the village, a bright wintry morning in late November, her big purple eyes were wide open with eager astonishment as she beheld the poplar log court house built in the center of a square, around whose decorous lines were planted a number of other houses not built of logs, but of crude brick laid with mud.

"How did they nail those houses, Uncle Berry?" Nancy demanded, as she stood up in the sled and craned her neck out over the high front seat.

"Stuck 'em together with mud, sweetling," answered Mr. Berry with a pleased laugh at Nancy's powers of observation.

"I thought all houses was made outen logs," she said, still looking back at the interesting houses without nails, as Mr. Berry

turned off the public square into the road that led out to Beechland.

"We 've got boards nailed over the logs in our house, Nancy," said Frank Berry with a laugh. "Only country folks live in log houses." Frank spoke with the condescension of fifteen years to ten and got the retort that is usually given between those ages, only Nancy's answer showed the quick wit to which she had been born.

"Logs raise up better manners than planks," she sniffed, with a flare of dignified anger from her big eyes.

"She winged you there, son, and I 'll limb you if you ever again give her cause for a shot like that," said Mr. Berry as he drove his steaming team along the road towards the plank-covered log abode. "A boy with a sister has got to make his steps slide easy and cautious like."

"Yes, Pa," answered Frank meekly.

"Welcome, Nancy, and may this be a true

home to you," Uncle Berry said as he stepped down over the runners and held up his arms to the bereaved child.

Perhaps what comforted Nancy most in her first hard orphaned days was the finding of Sarah Mitchell in the Berry household. Nancy had heard of Sarah's return after the Wayne Indian treaty, but it seemed too good to be true, to go off in a corner and sit with Sarah's arm around her and hear about the five years of captivity with the old squaw in the tepee. Such stories were a never failing diversion from her loss.

"Let me tell you about what the Indian did when he found your chewed rope that morning," Sarah would offer if she waked and found Nancy deep in the tears of mother hunger in the dead of night on the pillow next to hers.

"What did he do?" Nancy would stop sobbing to ask, though she had heard it over and over.

"He whipped his squaw first and then—".

And gentle Sarah never failed to be surprised by Nancy's showing her judicial temperament by remarking:

"That squaw oughter watched when he told her to."

And with Sarah in it the Berry home was a real home for Nancy the next decade of her life. The house was wide and comfortable and very typical of the homes that the pioneers achieved for themselves, after the days of "settling" had passed. The original log cabin of some thirty square feet had first been duplicated, with an open porch between the new room and the old. Then wings and lean-tos had been built and the whole covered in with a wide shingled roof, in which dormer windows had been cut to make available the large space under the arched timbers. Then an enterprising Scotchman had come along to build a crude saw-mill, and forthwith the log homes of the

well-to-do inhabitants of what had now been named the township of Beechland, and of Elizabethtown a few miles away, were covered with wide rough planks, which soon weathered to a soft gray.

Back of the Berry home rolled away more than a hundred acres, which Richard Berry, his boys and a few slaves obtained from traders, had cleared and planted with cotton, which soared in price by the month. Inside the house were all the comforts obtainable. Mule pack merchants had begun to stream out from the manufacturing centers of the Atlantic Coast, and they brought with them everything from thin china and silverware to exquisite purple and fine linen for the adorning of the gentry for a gala occasion. However, the majority of the population of Beechland and Elizabethtown was still clothed in homespun woven from the products of the fields near at hand.

And it was at the loom that Nancy first

distinguished herself and put herself in line to become as prominent a citizen of Beechland and Elizabethtown as of Lincoln Creek.

"Well, Nancy, how about Miss Killebrew's Dame School in Elizabethtown after Christmas," Uncle Berry had said to the young lady in his house one evening after supper, as they all sat around the fire in the big living-room which was bright with a rag-woven carpet, white cotton curtains and a melodeon in the corner, which had been a burden borne by two weary mules all the way from Philadelphia.

"I can read better'n Milly Hume or Jean Robinson right now, and they 're sixteen," answered Nancy, as she turned her wheel and set the fine white cotton thread running through her slim little fingers onto the huge wooden bodkin. "My mother knew more than Miss Killebrew and she taught—" here the firm young voice broke and tears glit-

tered on the swiftly moving fingers which did not falter at their task, even under the stress of an aching and lonely heart.

"Yes, and Nancy is a whole lot prettier 'n any girl in Elizabethtown," young Ned Berry hastened to exclaim with the loyalty of a deep affection, which had grown in his heart for his young foster sister. "I bet two bits her hair is a foot longer than any girl's that lives there."

"Well, as that is the case, of course Nancy don't need to go to school," agreed Uncle Berry with a twinkle in his eye as the dimples broke cover around Nancy's mouth, even while the last tear was dripping from her eyes.

"Yes, Sister Nancy always took more education than the rest of us sisters," said Aunt Lucy from her chair over in the chimney corner. "Nobody could want any more education than she had, and I expect she gave most of hers to Nancy."

"But maybe I have n't got enough, so I 'll go to school some," Nancy decided for herself, in a capable young voice, as she whirled her wheel. "Most of the time I 'm going to learn to make dyes out of wood things like Tom was teaching me and weave cloth in patterns for trade."

The mother of Abraham Lincoln was probably the first woman in Kentucky to enter trade and secure her own financial independence. By the time she was sixteen, Nancy Hanks was dyeing and weaving fabrics that competed with those of the mule pack and prairie schooner merchants. At that age of feminine enchantment she was very tall and broad and high headed and clean limbed. She clothed her beautiful budding young body in her own choicest weaves, and their cut was so suited to her lithe young lines that she strongly resembled a lady of very high degree as she went along her independent course of existence in and

out and around and about Elizabethtown, into which she rode whenever she chose. And nobody could deny that she was one of the small metropolis' most prominent citizens. Where Nancy Hanks happened to be, there was the center of interest.

Now Elizabethtown had reached that stage of its development from its settlement days at which the inhabitants begin to divide themselves into arbitrary groups, financial, cultural and religious.

Sandy MacGill had added a very good brick kiln to his now numerous saw mills, and he and Ned Berry, with his father's financial aid and advice, were becoming first-class builders of the sturdy, bewinged houses with white columns supporting the roofs of their front porches, over which roses of imported English variety wreathed themselves. And in the stately parlors constructed by Sandy and Ned, which were often planned out on paper by Nancy Hanks, on the win-

ter nights with Ned before the Berry log fire out at Beechland, there had come spinnets and melodeons, English chintz curtains, French damask, and also imported fine manners.

"Say, Nancy, Milly Hume got home from that Philadelphia school today, and they have learned all remembers of me outen her head," Frank Berry laughed as he filled his pipe and looked at the crude architectural sketch Nancy was making for Ned to use in constructing the eight-room house in which the father of the highly educated Milly expected to cage her. "Maybe my leather apron and tool box was what you call a disguise to her."

"Milly's head ain't big enough to hold you and a blue silk parasol at the same time, Frank," Nancy laughed with good-humored toleration. She had herself received a frigid salutation from Miss Hume that afternoon

in Elizabethtown, and she had been pondering it.

Two summers later Miss Mildred Hume, Miss Jean Robinson and a half dozen other feminine scions of the leading families of Washington County, Kentucky, were graduated back to their native heath, and about that time a still larger number of masculine young bloods got back from the foreign cities of Boston, New York and Philadelphia, where they had been sent for a cultural inlay upon their backwoods manhood. Thereupon social distinctions were for the first time laid down. On the Public Square Pioneers Hume and Robinson and Meriweather, in their purple and fine linen, still eagerly met Pioneers Berry and Sparrow and Hull and Clancy in their dark-eyed and dignified homespun, slapped each other on the back and swapped trapper tales and political opinions of Thomas Jefferson and

Henry Clay. They cordially bestowed choice wads of tobacco try-outs upon each other which led to the barter of hogsheads, even barnfuls, of the luscious and delicious weed. Nothing, neither wealth nor poverty nor travel nor politics, could come between these men who had conquered a Commonwealth together; but their children were digging a social gulf they neither noticed nor understood or even cared about.

"Over in Elizabethtown I heard that Gid Robinson's girl was giving a kinder home coming tonight and you young folks had better get to titivating yourselves for it early," Richard Berry had said one afternoon in the early summer, when all of the social world of Elizabethtown were aged from eighteen to twenty-two.

"We 're going to a candy pull over at the Hulls, Uncle Berry," answered Nancy, as she crimped a white tucker in a fine blue cotton dress she had spun, woven, dyed and

made for herself, which had in it purple lights like those in her lovely eyes and in which she was to be much more lovely than Jean Robinson in her Philadelphia dimity, and of which fact she was to get exact proof a few hours later.

"Well, why don't you young people frolic together and save lights and fire and maple sugar?" innocent Mr. Berry asked, as he passed into the house.

At about the same moment over in Elizabethtown Mr. Gideon Robinson was saying to the young beruffled and belaced damsel of his household:

"What 's the use in your having a party when they are having a candy pull out at Beechland at Ben Hull's, daughter? Why upset two families and tramp candy into two kitchens at once?"

Jean failed to answer him, but young Clinton Meriweather, who was seated before the spinnet, picking out a tune then popular

in the coffee houses of Philadelphia, from which city he had just returned after a number of years' educational sojourn, turned and presented a face of considerable interest.

"I wonder if Nancy Hanks will be there?" he asked.

"Sure to, and where Nancy is there is going to be a great frolic," answered Mr. Robinson with a broad and affectionate smile, as he polished his huge gold-rimmed glasses. "The minx sold me fifty pounds of maple sugar she and Frank Berry have made at a half cent over price, but I made her throw in a piece of homespun of a rich butternut that I want for a vest. Nancy is a born trader and the Lord help this township if she takes to horses."

"Poor, rough Nancy," Miss Robinson adjudged languidly, as she smiled with the intent of enchantment upon Mr. Meriweather, who was, to say the least of it, a very desirable and lovely personage in his tight snuff-

colored broadcloth trousers, pigeon-tailed long coat and much beruffled shirt surmounted by a high black satin stock. And his beauty was not his only allurement. A Clinton uncle of great wealth in Philadelphia had just concluded arrangements for the first bank in the township and had made young Clint its president, cashier and clerk. However, the young combination bank official failed to be enchanted and pursued the subject of Nancy Hanks.

"Breck Kyle says she is a humdinger," he observed, as he rose from the bench of the spinnet beside Miss Robinson with pursuit plainly in his eye.

And at that moment was laid a foundation for trouble from which brave Nancy was to suffer, even into history.

And the meeting of Nancy Hanks with Clinton Meriweather was after this manner:

Nancy had dressed early for the candy pull and ridden into Elizabethtown. She

had donned the violet dress with the fine white tucker which lay close and sweet in just the perfect line around the creamy column of her round neck, which supported her stately little head, bound about with fluffy red-gold braids in the most beautiful pagan poise, and fell open almost to the arch of her round breast. The soft fine cotton fabric was cut in long lines which displayed the fine symmetry of flanks and back and hips which were as strong and lithe as a man's. Her slender feet were clad in a pair of the most shapely slippers ever carried by mules from the city of Philadelphia, and her slender little ankles were covered by stockings knitted of the very finest thread ever drawn from a wheel, with the most intricate pattern of drop-stitch clocks ever devised by the mind of woman. And Nancy, though armed for conquest, was out for business, and the light that made her big purple eyes glow back of their dark fringe and her full red

mouth break over her big white teeth with a smile of delightful satisfaction, was from the fact that she had just sold Mr. Giles Claibourne another fifty pounds of sugar at a still higher price than that at which Mr. Hume had acquired his buckets and with no homespun to boot. The trade had been made in front of the Elizabethtown Tavern, and Nancy was not at all aware of the part her gala attire had taken in the deal, but laid it all entirely to her business acumen. Mr. Claibourne was the grocery king of the town as well as the Circuit Judge of the District Court. He was also a widower of thirty with four small Claibournes on his heart and mind in a disordered, negro-conducted home. Nancy could have sold him the sugar at any price if she had just recognized the fact.

And while she was smiling over her trade, she came face to face with Clinton Meriweather. They stood facing each other for

a moment like beautiful wood creatures, then both faces broke into delighted smiles.

"Nancy Hanks!" exclaimed the young banker with a sharp intake of his breath from very astonishment at the beauty of the girl.

"Is it Clinton Meriweather?" asked Nancy with cordiality beginning to shine back of the lashes that curled themselves up at an angle of delighted inquiry. "Welcome home!" As she spoke she held out her hand and Mr. Meriweather met a grasp whose strength surprised him.

"Please forgive me for the circleburs I put in your hair the last time I saw you, and the time I made you stump your big toe by jumping at you around the corner of Babbitt's store." As he pleaded, Clinton held Nancy's strong brown hand in his and turned and began to walk with her towards her horse, hitched in front of the Court House.

"When I heard you were coming home I put up my plats and put on my shoes," Nancy laughed, and the color rose on her cheeks as she found it slightly difficult to withdraw her hand from that of her old tormentor.

"Yes, you 'd better be—be on guard," Clinton answered her with color in his own cheeks. "I 've come home to stay now and I 'm going to make it worth your while to—"

"Oh, Clint, I think it is wonderful for Elizabethtown to have a real bank and I 'll be mighty glad to put my two gourds full of money in it, but how will you know whose money is whose? Tell me just how you 'll do it all." Nancy's quick change of mind from sentiment to business was so genuine that it carried Clinton Meriweather with her. There is nothing so exciting to a fledgling business man as to discuss high finance with a woman still younger and still more ignorant than himself.

When Nancy Hanks rode out to the Hull candy pulling Clinton Meriweather rode on her horse behind her, and they still talked business as her two-year-old Baldy pranced and shied along in the starlit twilight, jostling soft homespun shoulder against the brawn under the broadcloth. Nancy Hanks broke in most of the horses ridden by the feminine population of Elizabethtown.

The welcome of the candy pullers, for the banker, was hearty, for all stockade boys and girls had known each other well in a barefoot freedom of friendship when Indians had threatened. Rosannah Ingram and Hannah Lytsey pulled his candy with him with as openly eager coquetry as Miss Robinson had veiled, and Nancy Sparrow matched popping corn with him on the hearth. Great had been the mirth when the grain named for the guest of honor popped defiantly away from the one named for the little Sparrow. The young banker

picked up his kernel in feigned ruefulness, but later he handed it to Nancy Hanks with a significant look from his big blue eyes. Nancy ate it without looking at him, and turned to take walnut meats from Sam Hardstay's plow-calloused hand.

It was no wonder that it was after ten o'clock and every soft lump of molasses candy pulled into a yellow plat before Mr. Meriweather arrived at the Hume residence, just in time to have ice cream and cake served to him in paper frills, imported from Baltimore and France.

"Where 've you been, Clint?" demanded young Breck Kyle, whose indorsement of the charms of Nancy Hanks had been responsible for the bank president's pursuit thereof.

"Business," answered his friend. "The Elizabethtown bank has secured its first depositor."

"Who, Clinton?" demanded Jean with

cordiality coming back into her cool face and voice at thus hearing that business was the cause of her guest's late arrival.

"Nancy Hanks. She had nearly thirty dollars in two gourds, and they are now locked up in my safe. Yes, Kyle, she 's a humdinger."

Seven very highly educated young ladies exchanged significant glances at this moment and seven white shoulders above real lace frills were slightly elevated.

"Poor Nancy," remarked Jean Robinson, as she turned and began to make a noise of "Annie Laurie," of which poor Nancy would have made delicious music.

And to be just, how could a big strapping, beautiful free woman, who walked among the men their equal in strength and prowess and acumen, fail to be a menace to a circle of fine ladies, who had been taught at great expense that a woman's place is to sit at home and sew a seam, fine or coarse, accord-

ing to her station? Their little tea drinkings would have been dull indeed had they not had the doings of Nancy to thrill them with horror.

"I saw Nancy Hanks coming out of the woods with polk berries in a basket and, my dear, her dress is at least four inches from the ground. I could see all of her ankle."

"She had her sleeves rolled to her shoulders at the corn husking the other night, and husked with the men and beat them. How coarse!"

"I met her driving a hay wagon out on the road and I saw a half yard of her leg when she used the brake. Clinton Meriweather was with me and I felt so sorry for her, though she did n't seem to mind and waved her hat at us."

"I saw her standing in front of the Tavern talking to five men, who were all laughing at her, and I crossed the street."

"I met her in front of the Court House

with Clint and Breck and Lee the other day, and I simply failed to see them. Now Lee is n't speaking to me."

So it was that Nancy Hanks paid the penalty of being one of the buds on the human race that flower once in many generations in any land. The normal man resents the superman and the feeling is intensified when the persons in question are of the other sex. And as the supermen and women are apt to bud in the class of the genuine toilers, who do the constructive work of their communities, the protest of the cultured idlers is apt to be bitter. The situation has been voiced in song and story long before the day of Nancy Hanks, and will be repeated into the future indefinitely.

CHAPTER VII

BY the time she had reached her majority Nancy Hanks was indeed the foremost citizen of Elizabethtown, and if she had been a man she would have undoubtedly been either Sheriff or Judge. In her own small group of young folk she was an absolute dictator and she drove them fast and hard. However, at times she had serious group troubles, and not the least was with Nancy Sparrow, her own cousin, who was the thorn in the flesh of gallant Nancy, and whose escapades were often credited to the account that History was even then keeping on Nancy Hanks.

"Nancy, honey, I jest don't know what to do about my Nancy, and that wild Breck Kyle," her aunt Elizabeth Sparrow said to

Nancy Hanks, whom she had stopped as she was riding by the Sparrow home on her way into Elizabethtown with a bolt of butternut jeans and one of bleached cotton sheeting in her saddle-bags. "She went out with him last night on a buggy ride and—and it was 'most midnight when she snuck in. I don't want her daddy to know 'cause they would be killing shore. And Charlie Friend waiting to marry her, too."

"What did she say, Aunt Lizzie?" asked Nancy with determination lighting her purple eyes, and a firm line straightening the curves of her red mouth.

"She gave me sass and went on up the ladder into her room. Oh, I don't know what to do, Nancy, for I have my suspicions that disgrace is coming. Say something to her, Nancy, she 'll listen to you."

"Suspicion is the kind of thing that breeds disgrace. Don't you fret, Aunt Lizzie, I 'll attend to Nancy and—Breck Kyle," the

young dictator answered as she induced Bald to come down on all four feet and progress towards the Public Square. As she rode along there was the lilt of a scarlet tanager issuing from her throat.

If Napoleon Bonaparte had known of Nancy Hanks he would have given her a staff appointment. And when Nancy went into action she went into quick action.

After she had hitched Bald, the first of the eternal triangle she met was big clumsy Charlie Friend, who had cleared ten acres of land over on the Creek since his sixteenth year, planted it in cotton as he cleared, and who was now finishing the building of a two-room cabin on it. He had the strength of a Samson but his blood ran as weak as water when he was in the presence of Nancy Sparrow, though it also burned red in his huge ears.

"Howday, Nancy Hanks," he said with a broad grin as Nancy stopped, lifted the

bolts of cloth she was carrying from her head to her hip, and stopped for a parley with him. Man and boy looked upon Nancy as a comrade if they looked not with desire.

"Say, Charlie, folks say you are backward about asking Nancy Sparrow to live in that fine new cabin. I don't like folks to make fun of Nancy," as Nancy spoke these words of untruth and guile, she looked at Charlie, who had got crimson of ears at the very mention of the object of his desires, with affectionate respect that put stiffening into his very marrow.

"You well know that Nancy Sparrow won't even look at me, Nancy," poor Charlie faltered.

"She 'd have to look at you if you grabbed her good and hard and shook her and made her listen to you." Nancy advised this course of action well knowing that the most vigorous pioneer methods of love warfare had a hundred per cent. chance to succeed.

"I 'm skeered of her, Nancy," poor Charlie pleaded.

"Skeer never caught a woman for a man yet!" Nancy called over her shoulder as she swung away down the road, being wise enough to leave seeds to sprout and grow after she had planted them.

Her method of handling the apex of the eternal triangle was just as skillful if more direct. She encountered Breckenridge Kyle in front of the Elizabethtown Tavern and bespoke him thus.

"Breck, Nancy Sparrow is going to marry Charlie Friend Saturday night, and you are invited to mind your own business. If you don't I 'll ask Mr. Robinson to put a stop to your gallivanting. Uncle Tom Sparrow saved his life from two Injuns and he won't let one of his clerks bring trouble on Uncle Tom."

"Whew, Nancy, stop and get your breath," Breck laughed, but Nancy could

see that her shot had told. Breckenridge's position in Mr. Robinson's land claim office was a very ambitious and lucrative one, combining the maximum of returns with the minimum of effort. "I 've got to gallivant somebody because I can't get you," Breckenridge dared. "Nan Sparrow looks like you faded out."

"Sometimes gallivanting backwards draws a woman. Try that on me, Breck," Nancy provoked with a laugh that floated up even to the treetops as she again went on her way. The flash of her violet eyes over her shoulder at the tall young gentleman in small clothes and ruffled shirt was a condescending challenge from superior to inferior.

"God, what a girl!" Breckenridge muttered under his breath and did not suspect that Clinton Meriweather, standing on the steps of the Elizabethtown Tavern near by, had heard the exclamation, and jealously

echoed it. Breck was about to disregard her advice and follow Nancy, but Clinton was before him.

"Let me carry that cloth for you, Nancy," Clinton offered as his stride only slightly shortened to her step, for Nancy Hanks was very long and strong limbed and minced neither steps nor manners.

"Your broadcloth figger ain't suited to carry homespun, Clint,"—Nancy laughed as she refused to let him share her burden. "Mine is."

"You look like a peach blossom in that pink gown, Nancy," Clinton laughed in answer. "I never saw such a color except in some Chinee vases at Uncle Clint's in Philadelphia that cost a fortune and a half. Where did you get it?"

"Carded and spun and wove it, and dyed it with juice from the polk berries you helped me gather last fall. I sold three bolts of it to that Quaker merchant to carry back

to Philadelphia yesterday. I was just a-coming to bring the money to you in the bank, when I had got what's coming from this from Giles Claibourne."

"You have n't let me go into the woods with you for three months, Nancy, and when I go to see you we sit with Mr. Berry and the family. You don't even come to the gate with me. Why?" The young banker put his question with a real hurt in his keen blue eyes.

"Want the truth, Clint?" Nancy asked, looking him straight in the eyes, without a flicker in her purple ones.

"Yes."

"You was kinder getting a habit of holding hands with me, and honest, Clint, I was afraid sometime I might get careless and squeeze back and break a finger bone for you. If a woman's hand is overstrong a man's is in danger a-holding of it." And as she spoke Nancy paused on the threshold

of Mr. Claibourne's general store and this time the purple eyes challenged an equal.

"Damn you, Nancy Hanks," Clinton stormed, enraged at being laughed at and also at the fact that the very handsome, young and prosperous proprietor of the store was hurrying forward to take the bolts of cloth from Nancy, which he was sure she would turn over to him. The plum broadcloth upon his own slim, straight back was in this instance to be outshone by the butternut homespun upon the back of Nancy's avowed suitor, which he had bought straight off her loom at a fair price and fair only.

"Double same to you, Clint, and good luck," Nancy answered his oath with a flash of her white teeth and dimples as she turned and greeted Mr. Claibourne.

There was nothing for the banker to do but tip his three-cornered hat ceremoniously and betake himself to his banking. But the rage that had risen in his heart had been a

revealing flame and showed homespun Nancy enthroned there. He was aghast. And he was rebellious. Though only twenty-five years old, Clinton Meriweather's position in Elizabethtown was a commanding one and he had made the Elizabethtown Bank grow strong and prosperous. His vigorous, far-seeing mind had great pride of opinion and he was accustomed to dominate, with courtesy and charm it is true, everybody with whom he came in contact. The men were most of them in his financial clutches and both feared and liked him. The girls and young matrons of the social upper strata of the little city spoiled him and adored him and he was accustomed to the most vivid female adulation. No woman opposed his attentions—except high-headed Nancy, who flouted him to his face while drawing him with a charm which burned in his veins and ate into his very vitals.

There was in Nancy Hanks a great depth and height and breadth of the woman element which by nature attracted and fired the brains of the men with whom she came in contact, as well as their hearts. They wanted to talk with her, to argue with her, and to put an imprint on her mind. She was as a spark in tow to a man like Meriweather, who regarded all women as lesser human beings. His situation was in a manner desperate. He had set his ambition on a marriage that would help him build the house of Meriweather as solidly as he had built the Elizabethtown Bank, and he had paid court to a certain very elegant and wealthy damsel in his Uncle Clinton's aristocratic circle of friends in Philadelphia. He had visioned her at the head of a polished mahogany table, loaded with fine nappery, silver and china, set in the dining-room of the house about which he was already trafficking with MacGill and Berry. The

vision was now burned out by the sight of a girl in a peach-blow homespun with a burden upon her head and a flame of life in her eyes. He was a stricken man and he was delirious with his fever.

In the meantime poor handsome Giles Claibourne was having a brief hour of joy. Nancy had turned the cloth over to him, and while he was measuring it and the payment for it, he was witness to a scene that would have set any widower's heart to beating. Three-year-old Gilly Claibourne had caught sight of Nancy Hanks from behind his father's counter and the reunion of the two friends was joyous. Straight into her outstretched arms the small boy flung himself, and her red rose mouth met his budding lips in the perfect embrace. His head snuggled down on to her round breast and his arms held tight as she cradled him a second, and then flung him aloft far above her head,

and caught him as he fell squealing back into the cradle.

"Got peppermints, Nancy?" he demanded as he muzzled at her suspiciously.

"How 'll you trade?" asked Nancy with a laugh as she set him down on his feet and drew a paper parcel from her pocket, thus putting her youthful lover on the same business footing as that on which his father stood, and also young Banker Meriweather.

"A bushel and a peck of hugs around the neck," the young peddler answered in a formula she had taught him, and proceeded to administer his pay at the same time he began the use of his purchase, which gave Nancy a sticky dab on her cheek to boot.

"And there she was down on the floor in the middle of Claibourne's store, hugging his offspring in a most unseemly manner," was Miss Killebrew's report to Dame Evelyn Robinson at a tea drinking the next day.

"Poor Mr. Claibourne," sighed Mrs. Robinson, with concern for her favorite merchant's danger.

Her sympathy was well placed.

"Oh, Miss Nancy, how can you refuse us?" the father of Gilly was pleading, even as he counted the dimes, dollars and pence into the pink palm, whose life line was duplicated with the sign that palmists say is in the palms of the mothers of great men.

"I 'd never refuse Gilly anything," Nancy returned, as she snatched a kiss from the back of the now sticky three-year-old lover's neck, and escaped toward the door.

"He 'll be out at Mr. Berry's asking for a step-mother by tomorrow daylight," threatened the young father, as Nancy stepped out into the sunshine.

"Any man as goes courting for another is in danger. I 'll kidnap him," Nancy answered the threat as she swung out of sight.

The temperature of Mr. Claibourne's heart

registered about the same degree as Clinton Meriweather's over in the bank, who was waiting in vain for Nancy to appear to deposit in his care the money obtained for the cloth from his rival.

Nancy had an unusually large number of fish to fry that day. She went on across town and turned off the road into a little path that led to a small cabin in the clearing. An old crone sat by the door, and a helpless young woman lay on a split-rail bed in the corner. It was here that Elizabethtown's scandal was hiding itself, and Nancy Hanks was the only woman in town brave enough to seek its lair.

"How be you, Maggie?" Nancy questioned as she bent tenderly and laid one of her fine cool hands on the other girl's hot suffering eyes.

"My time 's come, Nancy," answered the woman, who was about to pay alone the price of a brief love shared with a mule-pack

merchant, who had gone on his way over the mountains.

"Not until come daylight," the old midwife took her pipe out of her mouth to mumble.

"Oh, will you come to help me, Nancy?" Maggie pleaded wildly.

"I 'll be here. Come, throw a rock at my window, Granny Betts, if it 's night," Nancy promised and commanded. "Don't forgit that no matter what happens you 'll have a baby, Mag, all your own." The woman flame in the purple eyes was like a stimulant to the suffering girl, who caught the spark of ecstasy.

When the next dawn came Nancy Hanks let go of the girl's hands she had been holding, while she went down into the great shadow from which all women retrieve new life, and took a wee human being into her strong arms by way of welcome into a big world.

It is recorded that the mule-merchant returned, and now a family in Pennsylvania boasts that "Nancy Hanks officiated at my grandmother's birth."

At the time, however, gossip in Elizabethtown had it that "Nancy Hanks was mixed up in that Maggie Hurt affair."

Oh, big tender Nancy!

On the evening before that birth dawn, Nancy had finished up the affairs of the triangle most satisfactorily, and she was resting from her labors with great profundity before old granny's pebble had been flung to summon her to the ceremonial of birth. And beside her reposed Nancy Sparrow, smiling the soft smile of love's security. Nancy had taken the young heart of putty and stamped upon it the crude image of Charlie Friend with the old but ever potent strategy.

The two Nancys had met at sundown at the gate of the home of Mr. Berry.

"Nancy," said Nancy Hanks, as she slipped one of her strong arms about the weak little cousin's trim waist, "I 'm mighty glad you are going to have that new cabin down on the Creek. I wish it was mine. I love to live here with Uncle and Aunt Berry, but I want my own cabin so bad that if you don't take Charlie quick, I 'll set after him. He 's nigh as good looking as the cabin."

"Where 'd you see him?" asked little cousin with a swift suspicion darting into her shallow eyes.

"Oh, I was talkin' with him over in Elizabethtown a while. He says it is all finished and ready to move into. I asked him all about it. It 's funny how a new house makes a woman want a turkey-tail duster and a man." Nancy spoke with the most interested unconcern, but did not fail to note the higher flaming of the suspicion in the blue eyes questioning hers, the flame almost crackling.

There was no woman in Elizabethtown, high or lowly, who would n't have been frightened at the very faintest idea of entering sentimental competition with Nancy Hanks.

The situation was thus made ripe for huge Charlie to blunder into, by the light of the moon, several hours later down at the Sparrow home.

After a good many minutes of tense silence, which puzzled and frightened him, he awkwardly floundered into the right path.

"Saw Nancy Hanks down town today. She 's a mighty sprightly talker."

"What did she talk about?"

"Er—er," Charlie paused, for he knew it would not do to give an account of the talk with Nancy, in view of the resolution he had taken upon himself to accomplish before the moon went down, if he turned into a fiery fluid doing it. "She talked mostly about the—the—cabin."

His hesitation did the business Nancy Hanks had negotiated for him.

"Whose cabin?" Nancy Sparrow asked, with a proprietary note in her voice that was unmistakable, and which gave Charlie the courage for the pioneer "grab" prescribed by Nancy Hanks.

"Yo' cabin and mine," he whispered fiercely to the back of Nancy's neck, as he came very near incapacitating her for life by cracking all of her ribs. Nancy Sparrow was in radiant spirits as she told Nancy Hanks all about it, staying at Uncle Berry's to sleep with Nancy, so that the confidences could have a long night session.

"Yes, I think Saturday night will be a fine time to marry. After a woman has shot down a man she oughter tend to him right away," Nancy the conspirator had consented with her last waking thought until Granny Betts threw the pebble hours later.

The name of Breckenridge Kyle had not

been mentioned between them, and Nancy Hanks knew that once captured, Charlie Friend would know how to take care of his own.

There are abundant records to show that the life of Nancy Hanks was not an idle one.

CHAPTER VIII

AND while Nancy Hanks was growing with the growth of the little border town, what had become of Thomas Lincoln back in the little wilderness settlement in which she had left him? How were these children of destiny to be drawn together again?

"Did you see Tom, and when is he coming?" was the question which Nancy put to Elder Jesse Head each time he passed through Elizabethtown on his circuit riding during all the years that passed between her and the beloved Thomas.

"Tom 's living and will be dying just in the same tracks you left him in, Nancy," the Elder would answer with a delighted twinkle in his shrewd old eyes as he beheld the growth

in beauty and wisdom his young favorite had made. "He always says, 'Tell me 'bout Nancy.' And after I get through telling and urge upon him the thought of coming with me and beholding he retires ten miles in the forest at the very thought of facing you. Tom 'll die a tongue-tied bachelor unless some woman uses force on him."

"No woman had better use force on Tom Lincoln," Nancy Hanks had flared back with her violet eyes in reply.

"Well, since Sallie Bush married Dan Johnson and moved over here, I reckon Tom is in no danger. Ever see Sallie?"

"I washed and dressed a ten-pound baby for her last week," laughed Nancy.

"Then you forgave her for slighting Tom at love feast ten years ago?"

"No, but a woman can't hold a grudge against a ten-pound man baby, can she?" Nancy answered.

"The good Lord fashions some women's

breasts and arms for cradle service to the offspring of other women as well as her own, Nancy, and you seem to be one. I want to commend you fer standing by Maggie."

"Wait until I get that mule-packer and make a daddy outen him for Maggie's baby, then commend me, Elder," Nancy answered. "Will you tell Tom Lincoln I say to be a-coming over here as he promised me ten years ago?"

"Yes, I 'll tell him and God bless you, child, for a faithful and friendly heart," the Elder answered as he and Nancy parted at the door of the Elizabethtown Tavern.

The ten years Tom Lincoln and Jo Hanks had lived in the parentless Hanks cabin home had passed without anything more eventful than life and death and cold and heat and hunger and love. William Hanks had moved away with a mate and left the two boys alone, under the eye of Mordecai

Lincoln and stern Susan, who had been somewhat softened toward life in general and Tom in particular, when he had made a tiny coffin for her baby, who had never breathed and in his own arms had shown it to her and borne it out to the edge of the clearing and buried it where she could look after the grave herself. Big Mordecai had not the skill to fashion so tiny and lovely a thing as Tom had made of the little cedar box. Nobody could then gauge the huge reservoir of tenderness that lay under the nature of the great, uncouth young man's heart, but a hundred years later men understood him better.

The bachelor establishment of Tom and Jo was cared for by the Runt, to whom Tom paid a wage of two bits a week, which he considered ample to define their relation as employer and employee, rather than that of master and slave. No papers up to that time had ever been made out concerning the

freedom of the Runt, and the incident of the stove-wood, the Sallie Bush singing book and the love feast were forgotten by all concerned, except that the heart of Tom Lincoln had freed his slave and was clean and at rest on the subject.

And the years had brought very little in the way of worldly goods to Tom Lincoln. For his work he was poorly paid and as he never made any point of enforcing his claims much of the time he was not paid at all. Mordecai Lincoln had considered his elder son's claim to all the Lincoln property, landed and personal, as beyond dispute, and Tom was not the person to contest a claim. He never even gave a thought to his rights to patrimony but did the work in hand, and haunted his beloved forests, dreaming great dreams we must believe, from his final results. The dreams of a man slow of growth, silent and tender, are apt to be potent. He was nearly thirty years old, nearing the age

at which the great-hearted Carpenter put aside His tools and went forth to save mankind, when His call came.

What Thomas took to be a call of need from Nancy Hanks, made him take his tools under his arms and go out in Nancy's world to answer, with Runt the shadow folowing him. And he found her at a crossing of roads.

No matter how a woman may claim, declare and affirm her freedom, there are snares set for her at the meeting of many paths, and it is impossible for her to keep out of them all. The keen brain of Clinton Meriweather, banker, was at work on the mechanism of a trap for Nancy Hanks, and when it was finished he was himself caught.

For many days after, the revelation of Nancy securely lodged in his heart, he shut the door of that organ and went about his business, determined to empty the shrine by ignoring it. He found that impossible, for

the more his thoughts ignored Nancy and engrossed themselves in the reckonings of barter and sale, the more his heart thirsted for her. The night of the full moon in April was his undoing.

Nancy had been down to see Charlie Friend and the infatuated wife she had helped him obtain, and had started home long enough before sundown to have reached there before moon-up, but the budding spring woods were too much for Nancy Hanks and she began to loiter and love the curling, budding, unspringing, blushing, perfuming spring all around her. She greeted the little white violets with rapture, she stepped carefully to keep from breaking the tall white Indian pipes, and she gathered the bronze trillium into a huge bunch for drying for one of her medicinal mixtures, which she slung over her shoulder on a stout hickory stick she had picked up for a whip stock. Just as she was on the edge

of the clearing she stopped to listen, entranced to a mocking bird courtship, in which the feathered suitor was risking bursting his little heart to gain an answering cheep from a white blossoming dogswood bough just below the pink-budded maple limb on which he tilted and sang. The final red gold rays of the sun were being sifted out of the first beams of the full moon and the opal glow wrapped Nancy around like the veil of a bride. When she turned from the last operatic flight of the small feathered lover, she turned into the arms of Clinton Meriweather, which closed on her hungrily.

"Nancy, Nancy Hanks," he murmured, as he pressed her lithe, strong body to his and tried to find her lips with his own. And the riot of youth in his veins called to the youth in hers as she yielded to his pressure and raised her face to his hunting. What Nancy Hanks saw in the eyes of Clinton

Meriweather made her draw away from him and lay her hand on his breast to hold him back from her.

"Don't, Clint, don't," she commanded, trying to draw completely out of his arms.

But she was trying to stay a flood with a woman's words, and his response to her sharp command, in which there was also appeal, was to force down her arm with his left, while his right was sweeping her to him. What the polished man of the world intended to do to the homespun woman nobody ever knew but himself, for the stout hickory stick cut a gash across his blond head and felled him like a slaughtered ox. Nancy Hanks could defend herself.

It just happened that Dan Mitchell and Sam Hardy were coming out of the wood with sacks of sassafras roots for the cattle on their backs, and to Nancy's call their response was swift.

"Ruffled hound! Hope you killed him,"

said Dan, as he put his cowhide boot in under the broadcloth-covered side of the prostrated gentleman and turned him on his back.

"Oh, no, Dan!" exclaimed Nancy, as she fell on her knees beside her prostrate suitor, her anger spent by the blow, and anxiety rising in its stead.

"He didn't do you a harm, did he, Nancy?" asked Dan in a quiet voice, but with the intent to kill in his eyes, as he demanded the truth from his foster sister.

"No, Dan, no," Nancy answered, as she looked him full in the face.

"Well, then he can live if he can," Dan decreed, as he stooped down to see just what damage she had done. "That knock is no more than he deserved and maybe it will let some sense into his gallivanting head. Put down your pack, Sam, and let 's carry him to the Elizabethtown Tavern, where he belongs." With which both men

deposited their burdens of sassafras and lifted a new and bloody one.

"You go on home, Nancy, and nobody won't know the difference," Dan commanded, with more eye to the conventions than Nancy, who had lifted the bleeding head on her arm as the two men started to go with their burden.

"And let him bleed to death? No!" answered Nancy as the little procession started, which by the time it had reached its destination, had started a scandal in Elizabethtown which smoulders to this day.

"He was forcing Nancy and she hit him," was the answer given by crude Dan right and left to the questioning crowd that followed them. Even at that trying moment the head of Nancy Hanks was not lowered a fraction of an inch, and she was more occupied with staunching the flow of blood, which dyed crimson the breast and front and sleeve of her homespun dress, than with pub-

lic opinion, then in the forming against her. Though to be accurate, most of the questioners turned from the injured banker with the angry and unsympathetic remark:

"Served him right, Nancy Hanks!"

And Nancy's conduct through the whole affair was entirely true to her character as a child of nature. When the procession reached the Elizabethtown Tavern, upon whose ground and only floor were situated the two large bachelor rooms of the banker, Nancy called for linen, turpentine and hot water, and proceeded to bathe and cleanse the wound she had administered, while people were looking right and left for old Dr. Cummins, who was as that moment up over the Means Feed and Harness Shop, deep in a game with a jug of Jamaica rum and oblivious to the spectacular need of his services.

After Nancy had succeeded in drawing the gap together with a long needle, which

she had bent and heated in a flame, she was proceeding to bathe the gore from the pallid face, when the famous scene with Dame Evelyn Robinson ensued of which the following is a well constructed account.

The very much flustered and bewildered matron arrived at the door in high color and great indignation at the details which had been carried to her of the outrage upon this bachelor member of her circle of friends. Duly escorted by her husband, she had hastened to the scene as soon as she had acquired his suitable escort and accomplished a suitable toilet, during which time her prostrated friend might have bled to death, if the woman in the case had regarded the questions of convention or costume.

"Stand aside, girl, and allow Mr. Meriweather's friends access to him," she commanded, as she fairly swept her draperies close to her as if to keep them from defilement.

"Come, keep the hot towel to the wound, while I get the blood offen him," Nancy answered, so intent upon her ministrations that she failed to notice the belligerency directed against her. As she spoke, she moved aside so that Dame Robinson could get a full view of the bloody man, the bloody pillow and her own bloody dress, for upon the white cotton of her homespun the gore was doubly terrible.

Dame Robinson, true to form, quietly and artistically swooned.

"And Evelyn Robinson's own ma shot a catamount that was making off with a chicken and skun him 'fore her man got home," old Mr. Beckett, the keeper of the Elizabethtown Tavern, muttered to himself sadly, after he had helped the abashed husband cart the useless woman away in her carriage with its high stepping bays.

It was after midnight before Nancy Hanks had been willing to leave her patient

with Granny Betts, who had come with basket and snuff stick to be installed as watcher nurse, and by six o'clock the next morning she was back to see to her bandaging, for she was accustomed to look after the odds and ends of surgery for Doctor Cummins during his frequent rum sieges. That day the whole of Elizabethtown whirled and raged with scandal, and probably brave Nancy, fighting with all her skill to keep down the fever of the patient, and keep the wound in a condition for healing, was the only inhabitant who was calm about the matter.

The sick room would have been overrun to the patient's great hurt if Nancy had not made a plea for him to the grim old tavern keeper.

"Just keep folks away until the fever goes and it begins to heal, and he gets his senses," she begged.

"I 'll do that thing," old Eph Beckett promised and that promise he grimly kept.

And while Nancy fought for the very life of the man she had prostrated, his near and dear friends lacerated and bruised her reputation until it was as black and blue as the area of his wound. Those with a sense of humor, laughed over the account of Dame Robinson's assault and swoon, and the knowledge that this was so added fuel to her flames of anger. She preened herself and bided her time.

It came the first day upon which the patient found himself able to be raised on a pillow and take broth from a bowl held by Nancy. His eyes had been following her for several days, but she had hushed him with authority whenever he had tried to speak. Today his strength was enough to assert itself.

"I have something to say to you, Nancy," he said, as he laid his bandaged head back on the pillow with only a fraction of the care he had been using in so disposing it,

which betokened its satisfactory degree of healing.

"Ask Granny Betts for it," Nancy answered him quickly, and as she spoke she picked up a bundle over by the door and walked out of the room in the most casual manner, and not with the air of shaking the dust from her feet.

It was in the fret of this betrayal that Dame Robinson found the banker an hour later, and it is to the credit of his self-control that he kept calm and let her babble on until he had extracted the entire situation from her.

"Of course as none of us were your immediate family, it was impossible for us to force this girl to leave your rooms, Clinton," she was rounding out her tale by saying.

"Especially as none of my friends were quite qualified to take her place," he added in the gentlest of voices. "Located where

it was, the wound was rather dangerous, with Cummins in delirium tremens."

"Well, since she struck you while you were—" here Mrs. Robinson paused in a veritable panic as she had apparently put her foot into her own words.

"While I was asking her to marry me. She was refusing me with vigor," Clinton Meriweather, banker, remarked quietly with his keen and very beautiful blue eyes holding those of Dame Robinson's sternly. The banker was proving himself a gallant gentleman when under test.

"Mar—ry you?" Dame Robinson fairly gasped.

"When I get her answer, I 'll tell my friends, favorable or unfavorable," the banker continued. "I 'll surely tell you and Mr. Robinson among the first for my close association in business with him makes me sure of his sympathy, whichever way my

luck runs." Banker Meriweather knew that Dame Robinson knew that the Elizabethtown Bank was financing her husband's largest cotton deal for the season, and he used that knowledge adroitly.

Dame Robinson in her velour silk and lace fled the situation and left it to Granny Betts.

When Nancy failed to return to her patient for twenty-four hours, he fretted himself into a fever and granny had to appeal to her. She came fluttering back to her nursling on swift wings.

Nancy Hanks had drawn back from the fierce arms of passion, but she was utterly incapable of drawing away from weak upheld arms of adoration, and she soothed the pale scarred head against her fragrant pink cheek.

"I 'm sorry, Nancy."

"I 'm sorry, too."

They were young and it was May day.

"Will you marry me, Nancy?"

There was no affirmative bond given to that question by Nancy Hanks, only the tenderness that it was her nature to give to weakness. Then she fled the sick room, never to return.

Through the mediums of the tongues of Granny Betts, who had been present at the entire interview, and Dame Evelyn Robinson, it became known that Nancy Hanks had been "asked" by Banker Clinton Meriweather and that his fate was still in the balance of her shapely hands. The next ten days were the most exciting that Elizabethtown had experienced since the last Indian raid and the strife was civil warfare. All the homespun gentry guffawed over the fact that Nancy had "lammed" the young plutocrat, but they liked him and in the main were for him and his suit, now that they understood it to be a legitimate one.

"Larruping a husband proper before she

gets him is a mighty good way for a woman to start housekeeping," Mr. Sid Sanders, the stage driver to and from Louisville, remarked. "Now you 've done put your mark on the banker you better marry him, Nancy."

"Marrying is putting a string around a woman's wrists that keeps her from larruping a husband after she gets him, Uncle Sid," answered Nancy with a laugh.

"Yaas, but the bonds of matrimony is mostly made of apron strings," was Uncle Sid's retort as he started on his journey.

CHAPTER IX

AND while the friends of Nancy laughed over her escapade and kept up a running fire of curiosity as to what her final answer to her most spectacular wooing was to be, the broadcloth circle in which Clinton Meriweather had his social being waxed indignant but prudent. A few words from the masculine heads of the families involved in various banking schemes as to the advisability of "waiting to see which way the cat jumped," in the matter of the banker's fate, kept the feminine riot at the point of smouldering. And women are not at all behind men in worldly judgment, and the future mistress of the handsomest house ever built in the township, whose second story was being laid in purple brick from the energetic

MacGill and Berry firm, would have to be reckoned with.

"After all the girl is very beautiful and men will be men," sighed Dame Evelyn Robinson as she looked contentedly at young Jean, over whose head drooped that of the rescued Breckenridge Kyle, as they sat together before the spinnet at the other end of the long parlor.

"I 'm glad he 'll get on his feet and out tomorrow, so as to hunt her down," chuckled Mr. Gideon Robinson. "I bet Tom Sparrow a hogshead of tobacco she flouts him after all."

And the wager on the subject between Mr. Robinson and Tom Sparrow was not the only one laid in Elizabethtown as to whether or not Nancy Hanks would marry the banker she had assaulted. By Saturday afternoon, May fifteenth, the tension had become like unto that out at the trotting track, which had been laid down two years

before, where roan two-year-olds could race bays of like years.

And it was upon that date that the young banker got into his small clothes and upon his feet again. Looking very pale and interest-inspiring, with the scar across his temple, he stood taking the air upon the steps of the Elizabethtown Tavern, and also taking the congratulations of his friends, masculine and feminine, who began to congregate around him. Dame Evelyn stood beside him, while Jean and Breckenridge had paused to greet him and chaff with Milly Hume, Buford Clark and several more young bloods with elaborately dimity-clad girls on their arms. And if the world of fashion was well represented on the Square, so also was the world of homespun. Aunt Lucy Berry and Aunt Elizabeth Sparrow were down with Mrs. Sam Hardstay, trading at the Clairbourne store, and Mrs. Lytsie and Mrs. Hull were on the same errand,

having their daughters with them. In fact representative Elizabethtown was congregated when Nancy Hanks and Mrs. Charlie Friend turned into the Square at the corner on which the Elizabethtown Tavern stood, thus reaching the very center of the stage before they knew they had made their entrance.

When Nancy Hanks suddenly looked up to see Clinton Meriweather, with her and his world as a background, gazing down at her with his heart in his handsome eyes, the moment was, to say the least, dramatic.

For a long moment they stood taking each other's measure, and who shall say what the result of their regard would have been, if Thomas Lincoln had n't walked from out the forest, around the corner and stopped ten paces from Nancy, his eyes on her face and the rest of the world outside of the range of his consciousness.

Even in the group of large pioneer men

he loomed tall and broad. His deerskin trousers were stuffed into rawhide boots and girted in the one white shirt he had ever possessed, which Nancy had made for him, and which had been a cherished treasure. It was open away from his brawny throat as usual, and upon the shock of black hair, stiff from a ten years' lack of greasing, was a coonskin cap, from which dangled behind the long bushy tail of the animal. In the hollow of one arm rested his rifle and his other balanced his bundle of carpenter's tools, wrapped in his leathern apron, on his broad shoulder. On his square-jawed, clean-cut face there was the quiet of the wilderness, until his dark eyes focused themselves on Nancy, as she stood poised towards him with a flame of delight in her black-rimmed purple eyes.

"Nancy," he said as a great, hungry smile spread all over his somber, still face. "Nancy, Nancy!"

"Tom, oh, Tom," was Nancy's answer with the lilt of the mocking bird in her white throat, as she flew to him and clung to his arm and the old gun.

With that cry Clinton Meriweather was answered, only at the moment nobody knew it. They might have surmised it by the way all thought of the banker, whom she had been just about to greet in the sight of the populace, passed from her consciousness as she drew the burly woodsman, the like of whom Elizabethtown had not seen in five years, across the street to the front of the Claibourne store, where her aunts stood. These relatives had noted the whole scene and their greeting to the intruder was not overly cordial.

In the meantime Clinton Meriweather's world had closed around him, hopeful that the crisis was passed, and flocked into the tavern to drink tea with him.

"When 'll I send for the tobacco, Brother Sparrow?" questioned Mr. Robinson, as he and Sparrow were watering rum together at the tavern bar out of sight of the tea party.

"Oh, shoo, Nancy was jest upsot by the crowd and seeing Tom, who was a brother to her 'fore her folks died. Give a man a courting chanst, can't you?" Thus Tom Sparrow put off the banker.

There were more events crowded into the first hours of Thomas Lincoln's residence in Elizabethtown than had transpired in all of his twenty-eight years put together, or so it seemed to him, and through it all he was actively conscious only of Nancy Hanks.

"Well, well, Thomas, how you have grown," remarked Uncle Berry, as he pushed his chair back from the supper table and took out the gold snuff box and refreshed himself, brushing a fleck from a fine ruffle Nancy had put upon his shirt front as a badge of his ex-

panding prosperity. "And you 're welcome, my boy, mighty welcome, as you may have guessed from Nancy's face."

"Nancy 's growed too," was Thomas' brilliant remark, as he smiled a smile as full of pride over Nancy's beauty as if he had produced it, though in fact his arrival had added to it no little.

"Young men had better walk respectful before Nancy, for she has got a powerful grip on a hickory stick and—" Mr. Berry was saying to Nancy's vast confusion, when Ned Berry cut into the conversation with practical intent.

"Say, Tom, I can put you to work tomorrow on the Meriweather house at a good wage," he said eagerly. "We 're mightily in need of the fancy work you and Jo was learning when I was over to Lincoln Settlement last year."

"It 'll be a fitting thing for Tom to get here in time to put a lick or two on Nancy's

house," remarked Uncle Tom Sparrow, who had come to greet his nephew, thus trying cannily to get a statement of intentions from Nancy, by which he could settle his wager.

Nancy's answer was to rise to her feet without a glance in his direction.

"Let 's go out in the woods before it is plum dark, Tom," she said. "I suspect Piedy of a new calf and I want to find her and house her tonight. The calf might be weak and make bear bait."

"Don't think she 's got any notion of flouting Meriweather, do you, Brother Berry, drat the girl?" Tom Sparrow inquired anxiously after Tom and Nancy had gone.

"I consider speculating on courting conniptions a waste of time, Brother Sparrow," Mr. Berry answered sagely.

"Maybe Tom Lincoln will put a spoke in that wheel," spoke up Aunt Lucy from the head of the table, upon which she was resting her elbows before beginning to clear up

the débris. There has not been invented any better detecter of love's vagaries than a woman's intuition.

"Shoo, Nancy would n't look at a shiftless fellow like Tom, with no more than a shirt to his back," laughed Mr. Sparrow. "I reckon my tobacco is safe."

Fifteen nights had the old moon, who had looked down upon the wooings of countless generations of man and woman kind, risen over the tree-tops in the forest surrounding Elizabethtown since Clinton Meriweather had met Nancy Hanks under the budding boughs of early May and attempted to seize her in rough hadns. Later, each night, had it shone down upon the flowering and sprouting and now it only glanced in toward morning, leaving the early watch to the mass of stars, which seemed to Tom and Nancy to swarm just above the tree-tops as they walked out under them in the fading twilight. The search for the calf

was forgotten and they sat side by side upon the trunk of a tree Ned had felled the week before, to use in timbering the fine Meriweather house, being built for Nancy.

Tom's face was lifted to the stars and Nancy could see that his lips were moving in the dusk and his face was solemn and still.

"What made you come at last, Tom?" she asked, and there was the wooing note in her throat that had been in the cheep which had answered the mocking bird lover's demand.

"Word came to me, Nancy, by a trader, that a man had tried to force you, and I greased my gun and come to kill him," was the quiet answer in Tom's deep voice. "I 'm just saying thanky to God I find you safe, honey bird." There was the croon in his voice which had stilled Nancy's five-year-old fears, and now it fell into her heart like the echo of one of its own throbs, which were rocking her round breasts high and low.

"He did n't do nothing to me, Tom, I just

did n't—did n't want him," Nancy said after a minute's stillness.

Then they turned to each other, moved by one motif—Nancy was crushed in Thomas Lincoln's strong arms and he cradled her on his breast with a tenderness she had long known, and for which she now knew her woman's soul had waited. Her heart beat on his with the great, slow, strong pulses of perfect mating, and her red lips drank in his love like a chalice takes a sacred wine of life.

"Oh, Nancy, I ain't fittin' for you," was his first cry after the fusion.

"Nobody but you, Tom, never," was her steadfast answer, as she drew his cheek down and pressed it against her breast.

"Nobody but you, Nancy," he ratified.

"Don't you never cut and grease your hair, since I left you, Tom?" she laughed as she sobbed, looking down into the solemn gray eyes raised to hers, thus breaking a ten-

sion which the watchful stars must have felt, so potent was it to become in the destiny of one of their kindred worlds.

His answer was the first audible laugh that Thomas Lincoln had ever given forth as he raised his head from her breast, and again took her into her old, accustomed cradle of his arms.

"Sure you 'll be able to trim me up into a husband, Nancy?" he asked.

"I am sure," answered Nancy with entire confidence, as she ran her capable hand over the beloved black shock. "Saturday week will be June 12th, and that will do," she decided, after rapidly counting her days.

Tom's answer was his cheek laid gently against hers.

"Now let 's talk," Nancy said, with a thirst in her voice as if she had for many years been silent.

Late into the fragrant night hours they questioned and answered, and all marauders

were turned aside from their communion. The crickets and the katydids and the tree toads muted their burr to a mere chorus to the soft duet of their happy voices. The nesting birds above their heads chirped a sleepy commendation to the human nest-planning going on below them, and fluffed drowsy wings above the young lives they were hovering.

"Charlie and Ned will help raise us a cabin down on the creek, near Charlie's, in a few days. You can make the furniture little by little," Nancy planned with her slim fingers molded into his huge hand by a pressure which would have hurt a fine lady, but which the strength in her own gave back in equal measure.

"I 've got the money to buy a bit of land. Here it is, honey bird," Tom agreed, and he reached down in each boot and drew out two pouches made of moleskin and heavy with

coin and script, thus with all his worldly goods endowing Nancy before the ceremony which it is usual to have accompany such a bestowal.

"I 've got some money too, and we 'll buy it together," Nancy said, as she laid the fortune on the stump beside her.

"I can't believe it is true," poor Thomas suddenly faltered, as he drew Nancy into his arms again. "I 've been so lonesome all my life, Nancy, with you lost to me. I ain't much but I 've never harmed nobody," and with his cheek pressed to the soft haven she had shown him poor inarticulate, unlettered Thomas Lincoln poured into the heart of his mate all the pent-up humiliations, discouragements, longings, strivings and ambitions that had filled his silent self-contained life.

"If I had n't learned to pray to God, Nancy, I could n't have stood it, but Elder

Head helped me to that," he said at last, as he rested content against her shoulder with her hand stroking his hair.

"I wish Elder Head was a Presbyterian instead of a Methodist," Nancy said. "Both of them just sprinkles, and what's the difference?"

"Presbyterians declare against slavery and I 've got to hold with 'em," Tom said as he sat up and threw back his head like a war horse scenting the fray.

"Of course we 'll hold with them that everybody ought to go free," Nancy assented, as she rose to her feet and took Tom's fortune from the tree trunk beside her. "But let's get Elder Head to marry us, as there ain't no Presbyterian preacher in town now. I 'll be glad to have him."

"Keep talking that word 'marry,' Nancy, so as I 'll get it in my head before I have to let you go away from me in the house," Tom said as he and Nancy walked hand and

hand away from the place of their betrothal, which had been out in God's open as had the betrothal of the first man and the first woman.

And hand and hand they went into the clearing and to the back door of the Berry home, which was dark and hovering deep sleep. Tom was about to take Nancy into a good-night embrace, when a shadow fell between them.

The Runt rose from the doorstep and flung himself with a laughing sob down in the dust at Nancy's feet and buried his woolly head in her skirts as his long arms embraced her knees.

"Howdy, Miss Nancy, howdy," he gurgled in the depths of emotional joy, which is the characteristic of his race.

"Why, Runt, where did you come from?" Nancy cried with welcome in her voice, as she patted the woolly head and then pushed Runt back on his flat heels.

"I come with Marse Tom. We shot a deer and toting it made me behind him on the road."

"I told you to call me Mister Tom and not Marse Tom, Runt," said Tom sternly. "Somebody 'll be thinking you belong to me."

"Yessir," answered the Runt meekly. "But lessen somebody makes me I ain't a-going to say I 'se a free nigger."

"Well, go and get in the hay in the barn," Nancy commanded quickly, thus stopping an argument which had gone on for twelve years. With a chuckle the Runt obeyed, having for once said the last word on the sore subject.

The old moon got around in time to see Thomas Lincoln for a last time take Nancy Hanks in his strong arms and dismiss her into the silent house with an embrace whose force was ordained to produce power, as surely as were the great coordinated parts of

the driving machine in the steamboat Robert Fulton had just launched for the first time on the Hudson River at about that date.

CHAPTER X

THE ten days before their marriage sped by Thomas and Nancy so fleetly that they could hardly count them. If her family and friends disapproved of her marriage, they failed to say so, and the whole Elizabethtown "wished Nancy well," though predicting that she was "throwing herself away," having "gone through the woods and picked up a crooked stick." As she had predicted, Charlie Friend and Ned Berry were glad to help Tom raise a big one-room cabin, almost the exact counterpart of the one into which he had carried Nancy on her arrival from Virginia into the Wilderness, and the last three days before the solemn event he had free for making a few neces-

sary pieces of furniture. Thursday afternoon he spent setting the strong post upon which he was going to nail the split rails to hold the cords for the swinging of the feather bed, which the aunts Lucy and Lizzie were industriously stuffing into a tick Nancy had woven, even while she was saving the down of wild fowl, thus making the bed she was to lie in. While he was at work Nancy came in the door, flung herself into his arms and began to cry with her cheek pressed to his hairy breast, from which as usual the hickory shirt fell away.

"Hush-e, hush-e," he crooned, with the old quieting charm. He did n't ask the cause of the outburst, he just cradled and hummed. Tom Lincoln always used words as a last resort.

"I had to go to Clinton Meriweather's bank for the money to pay for the land," she sobbed.

"Did n't he speak you fair?" demanded

Tom, as the muscles in his tender arms tightened.

"Yes, and he 's going to Philadelphia tonight," Nancy said, controlling her sobs but with her arms creeping up around Tom's neck. "He thinks I was n't square with him."

"Well, thinking don't hurt nobody," Tom soothed, as he put her from him gently and went on nailing the rails for their nuptial couch. "Maybe it 'll help you to put a little elbow grease in the way of polishing on that table I split out for you this morning over there in the corner. Do you want to sleep with your head east or north?"

"North," answered Nancy with the color rising up to the very edge of her purple eyes. Tom laughed and kissed her, thus restoring her equilibrium, but sealing up within her the hurt of her interview with Clinton Meriweather.

And the ordeal had been a hard one.

Nancy had hoped to find other clients in the bank, but Clinton was alone when she entered, and immediately came over to the railing that separated his safe and desk from the rest of the room, and stood beside her. It was the first time they had faced each other since the long moment when Thomas Lincoln had stepped between them and at the sight of her, with the love lustre upon her face and body, had risen in the heart of the shrewd man of the world an overwhelming desire to battle for what he wanted. And in his passion he was a formidable adversary.

"Do you fully realize what you are doing in marrying this Lincoln, Nancy?" he asked with only quiet and gentleness in his cultured voice.

"Yes," answered Nancy with a proud uplifting of her beautiful head.

"I don't believe you do and I want you to let me put it to you plainly. I ask it be-

cause—because I think my love for you gives me the right."

The demand appealed to Nancy's sense of both justice and generosity.

"Yes," she answered again with tears deep in her eyes for what she could not help but see the strong man was suffering.

"In your twenty-third year you are marrying a man your inferior in every way, who is too old for you to raise to your own standard. He can neither read nor write, and it is not likely that he will be able to take care of you. I have offered you everything to make a woman's life complete. I ask you to stop and think, before it is too late."

Could a woman have been more fully tempted?

"I love him," Nancy answered with a flame in her eyes which is a race signal which must be obeyed if great results are to be obtained. "I thank you, Clint, but I love Tom Lincoln."

"Then that 's all, Nancy," answered the banker as his keen mind signaled his hot and ravished heart the uselessness of protest. "I 'm going to Philadelphia by tonight's stage and Mr. Robinson will attend to the banking until I get back. Your account is all in order. I hope you are going to be happy. If you are not—" a grim line came around his mouth and a spark struck out of his eyes, which he quickly veiled. "Good-by."

The grimness in his powerful face and voice frightened Nancy, and sent her flying to Tom. What was it in the gentle, rough, strong frontiersman which made destiny select him to mate with Nancy Hanks instead of one of the most intellectual and powerful men west of the Alleghanies? Is it that real race power is drawn from the hearts of the blessed "meek, who shall inherit the earth"? Twice at least we know that the Lord has chosen the sons of carpenters to

die to make men free; the sons of Joseph of Nazareth and Thomas Lincoln.

The few days before the wedding of Thomas and Nancy were so crowded with worldly events that they had not a moment for love's communion, and the maid kept the man's head in such a whirl that he was more stupid and awkward than usual. He finished all necessary furniture and on his broad shoulders he transported bundle and box and basket and jug and bucket and kettle through the forest that lay between the Berry home and the new Lincoln cabin, until he had trampled and kicked in the undergrowth a well-defined path from door to door. And each journey the Runt, a patient little pack mule, trotted behind him, shuffling his big bare feet and singing in a plaintive monotone, in which Tom sometimes joined him.

The very day before the wedding, the Runt's employer, not master, stopped in his

transporting job long enough to knock up a rude shelter of cedar posts for his employee, in which he threw the cedar boughs and a skin blanket for a bed for the little black crow. After he had finished it, and was just ready to pull the door of the cabin to, and go back for another load, Nancy came along the path through the forest, and her rich clear voice was singing Tom's favorite hymn, the outpouring of the soul of Charles Wesley, which he had made, as a treasure for the ages, when he found himself in danger of death from the actual waters of a great storm.

"Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly;
While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high,"

Nancy sang and as she came into the clearing Thomas Lincoln's rich voice rose and joined hers, in the greatest plea ever written:

"Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on thee;

. . . . . .

Cover my defenseless head
With the shadow of thy wing."

"What kept you, Tom?" asked Nancy, as Tom took the basket full of white linen from her head and kissed her red lips in the process.

"Building a little shack for that worthless Runt," Tom answered, after another kiss. "He 'd die if he had to sleep more 'n a hundred feet away from me, drat him."

"Say, Tom, you freed Runt, why don't you ask him to make return and free you?" Nancy teased as she walked into the cabin, fanning with a white, ruffed, pink-lined sunbonnet her cheeks, hot from the long and burdened walk, and also love's imprint.

"Ain't it purty, honey bird?" Tom asked, as Nancy stood looking around at the little home with shining eyes.

"It is just a little under heaven, Tom," answered Nancy, crowding close between his arm and his heart. "Nothing to do but put these bleached curtains to the windows you made so nice and big on account of my spinning and to spread the bed."

"I think this cabin got sorter located jest inside them pearl gates without our knowing it, Nancy," Tom answered softly as he held her close and looked over her head around the cabin room.

And the home that Thomas Lincoln built for Nancy Hanks in the township of Elizabethtown in the year of our Lord, 1806, would touch the heart of any woman even to the fourth and fifth generation. Tom had arranged with his brother Mordecai to send his skins by a mule-packer, and before the cabin's huge rough stone fireplace was spread all that remained of the big bear Tom had killed in Lincoln Settlement, whose fat Nancy had expended on his head during her

ninth winter. It was a noble skin. Others of deer and wild cat and coon lay about, and over the foot of the rail bed was thrown a blanket of the finest moleskins, which Tom had made in long, lonely winter nights like a woman makes a patchwork quilt.

"I always intended it to cover you, honey bird, but I did n't think that I would—" Nancy interrupted him by use of blush and kiss.

"With the bright pots and dishes and my wheel and loom, and my herbs and things hanging from the rafters, and the twig broom and the candle box full, and my rocking chair—" she was saying when Tom interrupted her.

"With Aunt Nancy's big Bible and your 'Pilgrim's Progress' on the table, with two dips for lighting, I tell you, Nancy, it—it—is jest a home, a thing I ain't never had before."

"You 'll never be lonely again," Nancy

promised, as she noted the sadness of a life's longing that lay back of the day's joy.

"Never, with you," Tom assented.

"And here 's the marriage bond you and Uncle Berry have got to sign, and leave in the court house for a record, that they ain't no reason why we should n't marry," said Nancy, as she took a paper from her pocket.

"They ain't no reason in this world why I should n't marry you, Nancy, except my unworthiness," Tom said thoughtfully.

"There 's no reason in this world or under heaven why I should n't marry you, Tom," Nancy gave true and honest answer as she looked him full in the face. "Because I 've worked around amongst the men, folks have backbit me, Tom, but I 'm honest."

"I know it, Nancy," answered Tom, with the confidence shining in his face which a good man always feels when he puts the fate of himself and his posterity in the hands of a woman. "Read me this here bond."

Thereupon Nancy Hanks, who could read, read to Thomas Lincoln, who could not read, the marriage bond which with their licence of marriage is spread upon the records for all men to see, even unto this day.

Know all men, by these presents, that we, Thomas Lincoln and Richard Berry, are held and firmly bound unto his Excellency, the Governor of Kentucky, in the just and full sum of Fifty Pounds, current money, to the payment of which well and truly, to be made to the said ourselves, our heirs, etc., jointly and severally, firmly by these presents, sealed with our seals and dated this 10th day of June, 1806. The condition of the above obligation is such that, whereas there is marriage shortly intended between the above bound Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks, for which a license has been issued: now if there be no lawful cause to obstruct the said marriage, then this obligation to be void, or else to remain in full force and virtue of law.

THOMAS LINCOLN (SEAL)
RICHARD BERRY (SEAL)

WITNESS: John H. Parrott, Guardian.

"Shoo, all that fuss and fine words and money put up just to sorter hold us to hav-

ing a right to marry, when the Lord gave us to each other nigh fifteen years ago, you five and me ten years," said Tom with a chuckle. "How am I going to sign it any way, when I can't write my name?"

"You can just make your mark, Tom, and I 'll make mine on the licence, so as not to shame you, because you 'll be reading and writing before snow flies, with me to teach you," answered Nancy, with ambition for Tom blazing in her purple eyes.

"Maybe," answered Tom warily. "Did you bring my white shirt?" He thus strove to substitute one ambition for another in Nancy's breast, and succeeded for the time being, though before the predicted time Nancy had taught him to scrawl T. Lincoln.

"I washed it and ironed it myself, Tom," answered Nancy eagerly. "And, oh, Tom, you know how to fix yourself good; will you do it for the wedding tomorrow?"

"Nancy, I give you my word of honor

I 'll do all the things you did to me the time I first wore that shirt and some more too. If you don't trust me I 'll come along over to Uncle Berry's, and let you polish me off. I want to do you credit, honey bird, I do, shure." Tom's face was very wistful as he looked at lovely Nancy, standing in the doorway.

"You and me will do each other credit, Tom," Nancy answered, a flare of ambition in her purple eyes and the gift of prophecy descending upon her for the moment.

The twelfth day of June, eighteen hundred and six, dawned in Elizabethtown in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, clear and warm, with fragrant breezes loitering over the tree tops in the forest and shaking down petals of the wild rose in the undergrowth and of English roses on the threshold of the homes in the busy little town. Soft white clouds, that looked like the tips of the wings of hiding attendant angels floating about in

the blue waiting to descend as guests at the wedding of Nancy Hanks and Thomas Lincoln, rose on the horizon.

Members of the Berry and Sparrow households swarmed in and about and around, getting all in readiness for the big "wedding infair" to be held out in the edge of the clearing at Old Rock Spring, to which well nigh the entire country-side had been invited. Long before the dawn of the wedding day, Uncle Berry was up and seeing that the carcases of a young beef, a lamb, two shoats, and numerous wild fowl were roasting over the barbecue pits which he had had dug the day before, and in which Runt and Ned Berry had been burning hickory logs down into beds of coals all night. He mixed, himself, the huge black pot of herbs and butter and vinegar with which the baking meat was basted, and sniffed often and carefully during the day, to be sure that the roasting was being done slowly but surely, which

would result in a crackling brown crust with not an inch of burnt skin to mar the perfect taste.

Aunt Lucy and Aunt Lizzie and their women friends worked around corn pone and pound cake to cup custards, and cold slaw and back again, until the huge flat rock, on which was spread the thickest Berry homespun damask, was in danger of tilting with its burden of food. The gentle young matron, Sarah Mitchell Thompson, who had come twenty miles with a new-born baby to the wedding of her best beloved cousin, and pert little Nancy Sparrow Friend worked in Nancy Hanks' little dormer loft bedroom, smoothing out the fine white homespun wedding dress and packing a few of her things in a bundle, to be carried to the cabin out in the clearing at the last minute. And among them Nancy walked, drinking in their kindness and affection, as a flower drinks in the sun and the dew, but she walked alone.

Thomas Lincoln had taken to his beloved woods in an agony of embarrassment and awe. Tom was not accustomed to be the center of interest.

"I bet Tom have gone clean back to Lincoln Settlement, and if you say so, Nancy, I 'll get on a mule and drag him back for you," Uncle Tom Sparrow teased, as he lifted a keg of elderberry wine, of Nancy's own brew, out of the cool cellar and carried it over to set in the cooler drip of Old Rock Spring.

"Nobody has to rope in a bridegroom for Miss Nancy," Giles Claibourne said, as he looked wistfully at Nancy and then at pretty Hannah Lytsey with whom Nancy, with practical cunning, had set him to selecting smooth rose-colored chips of cedar to be used as plates for the feast, from a pile Tom had cut the day before at the woodshed.

"Tom will be here," Nancy answered, with a soft laugh in her throat and in her eyes.

She knew so well what Tom was undergoing, but she dared not go to him and leave the guests.

The family and the near of kin and friends who had been helping prepare the "infair," were just about done with their task, and the sun had sunk almost to the treetops, from which height he grants to the earth the witching hour, when Elder Head arrived and gave the signal for the wedding array. The men washed up at the pump in the back yard and assumed their decorous Sunday coats, of either broadcloth or homespun, while the women took off the aprons that had shielded their festive dimity, shook out their ruffles, smoothed water-waved and banded hair, and began to ask if the bride needed assistance in her toilet.

It was the custom in the pioneer life to have the actual wedding ceremony performed with only the family and next of kin and friends as witnesses, just before the

waves of the infair were scheduled to break over the then already married pair. There were not more than two dozen well-beloved "folks" in the long, low-roofed Berry living-room to witness the marriage ceremony of Nancy Hanks and Thomas Lincoln, and their eyes were dim as Nancy came into the room in her soft white gown, with a rose in her red-gold hair, seeming somehow to their tenderness as the woman incarnate. She walked over to the fireplace, before which sat Elder Head back of a table, on which lay the large Bible sweet, dead Nancy Shipley had brought with her as she followed big Joseph Hanks into the Wilderness, and herself lighted from the flint box two tall candles of her own dipping, and with her own steady hand opened the Book at the verses she wanted read to begin her marriage ceremony:

"Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as

death—many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it—"

Then she turned, and with the love light of the ages on her face, held out her hand to Tom, who had been standing in the doorway watching her. He came straight to her with his fine head held high, and the freedom of a woods animal in his lithe stride. Then, with his solemn eyes sunk deep in hers, he stood before Elder Head and made his marriage vow:

"I, Thomas, take thee Nancy, to have and to hold, until death us do part."

And Nancy answered him with her eyes and with her lips:

"I, Nancy, take thee Thomas, to keep to, only as long as we both do live."

Both vows were kept and the result was justified.

The "infair," which followed immediately, at which the whole countryside was present, was such a notable occasion that Daniel

Bishop, then twenty, when nearing a hundred years of age, compared most unfavorably all the like functions he had attended in the eighty years that passed from that date, with "the infair at Nancy and Tom Lincoln's wedding."

After the feast had been consumed, the songs all sung, the toasts drunk in the elderberry wine, the dancing all over, and the fat pine torches flared down into ashes, Nancy tore herself from loving embraces and went out into the forest with her husband, along the path he had worn from her old home to her new. In his hand he carried her nuptial bundle, and under her arm was sweet, dead Nancy's Book of Books. Far before them flitted the shadow of faithful Runt.

When they had reached the door of their humble home, and Tom had drawn Nancy across the threshold and into his arms, a star rose in the East and shone down over the sacred veil of hovering, purple darkness.

CHAPTER XI

THE first two and a half years of the married life of Tom and Nancy Lincoln passed by in happy, busy, contented pioneer life that kept through the passing seasons the decided flavor of the honeymoon. Thomas Lincoln had been too long without the tenderness of a woman's love to be easily satisfied, and he would hurry home from his carpentering through the woods to the little cabin in the clearing, with all the eagerness of a lover, even run the last few paces to clasp Nancy in rough arms, as she stood dimpling at the door or the edge of the wood waiting for him.

"What you got for supper, honey bird?" he would ask after his heart hunger had been satisfied.

"Roast squirrel, corn pone and poke greens," she would be likely to answer, and very soon thereafter prove her statement by setting the steaming food before the hungry man, who never failed to go to the cedar bucket and earthern pan at the back door to wash his hands and face, after Nancy had reminded him to do so a few times when they were first married. "What have you been doing today?" she would ask, as she sat opposite to him doing her full trencher duty.

"I was putting the roof to the new rooms Eph Beckett is building to the Elizabethtown Tavern. And say, Nancy, me and him had one good ruckus over this here law that if a slave gits away, his master kin go git him. Eph, he held that a nigger is property like a hawg or a horse that he paid money for, and he had a right to go git him. I held that a man had no right to own another man, even if black, in the first place, much less hound him down. We had it up

and down and Eph he got hot under his collar. I did n't have no collar on, but I shut him up, after a considerable crowd had gathered, by asking him if it is right to hold slaves, why did Mister President Jefferson make a law that no more be brought from Africa after next year. Old Eph would die by that Tom Jefferson, and so he shet up."

"Mr. Beckett is old, Tom, and I would n't argufy with him tomorrow," Nancy advised, as she helped Tom to the squirrel rump and some more of the pone.

"I won't have the chanct to fer he told me he could git along without me," Tom answered with a baffled look coming into his eyes. "A man oughter have the right to his say and his work separate. I hold against slavery strong, and Eph holds for it, but that don't hurt the way I shingle his roof. I won't have no man put a muzzle on me just because he pays me money."

"No, don't you never let any man make a slave of your speech, Tom," Nancy agreed with a flame rising in her eyes.

"But if it keeps up against my work we might git hungry poor," Tom said slowly, with anxiety drawing lines on his rugged face.

"Well, just declare for freedom when asked and trust the rest to the Lord, who made us all free," Nancy advised with high headed courage, as she began the simple operation of clearing the table and putting a bountiful dinner for the freedman Runt, who was sitting on his heels at the front of his snug shelter waiting for it.

"Oh, I reckon Eph will come around when he wants a good story tolt him," Tom said, as Nancy filled his pipe, lit it by expertly picking up a coal from the embers of the supper fire, drew it once herself and handed it to him with a kiss and a stroke of the rough black hair. "Hurry up, honey bird, and

come read me a new story outen the good Book to coax him with."

Thomas Lincoln had always been a good story teller in his dry quiet way, to the hunters and men around Lincoln Creek, but, since his residence in Elizabethtown, the gift had been greatly developed. Many of the backwoodsmen he worked with could not read and nothing delighted Tom or them more than to have a story conference at noon time or on a Saturday night, when they brought their wives and daughters in to trade with the merchants around the Square, while they waited to "tote" home the purchases. Tom's slow mind was very retentive and the "Æsop's Fables" and "Pilgrim's Progress" were veritable gold mines to him and through him to the other working men, as well as all of the stories of the Bible. No matter how tired he was, after one of Nancy's good suppers, he would always light two candles, lay the books on the

corner of the table, pull Nancy's rocking chair up, sprawl himself on a bench close to her so his arm could find her at a second's notice and give himself up to the enchantments her rich voice could extract from the written page of the old books. The wit of the Fables and the Progress of Faithful always came first, and then Nancy would pause a moment, while Tom drew closer and put his rough head on her soft shoulder, as she opened the Book with reverent fingers and began to read and re-read the stories that dead Nancy Hanks had read to the two children from the Book she had brought on a mule-pack from Virginia in place of food for herself, knowing that she must thus bring the bread of life with her into the Wilderness.

"I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you of their bondage," was the crux of the story he still loved best and he would invariably

raise his head with the fire of the zealot coming into his eyes and ask:

"The Lord meant folks to be free, Nancy, did n't He?"

"Yes, Tom, He did, and some day they all will be free!"

"Let 's put it in our prayers, Nancy," Tom would answer, when he knelt beside Nancy with his head bowed against hers as they said prayers every night before blowing out the candle.

From the simple faith and communion of these two pioneers came the force that freed hundreds and thousands of black human beings with hearts and souls.

Yes, the days and weeks and months flew by for Nancy Hanks Lincoln as she worked and sang in her cabin on the edge of the forest. The "one heifer yearling called Piedy," which her father had given to Nancy in his will, had two descendants in the shack outside the cabin and many pounds of gilt-

edged butter did Nancy take or send into Elizabethtown by Thomas, along with beautiful fancy woven lengths of cloth, that were eagerly sought by the gentlemen of the town for vests, to be exchanged for gilt-edged coin. She also exchanged packages of herbs, strings of pepper and piggins of maple sugar, that she boiled whenever the sap ran, for banknotes and added them to the score she and Tom were using to make payments on a tract of land over on the Big South Fork of Noland Creek.

For some time after her wedding Nancy would mount Baldy, the steady nag given to her and Tom by Brother Jo Hanks, a descendant also from the Baldy of their father's will, behind Tom and take her "truck" in for trading herself, which she conducted with her old skill and joy among her former customers. Then for awhile she had to give that up for the business of producing small Nancy, who came in the spring following

her marriage. A baby is an effectual hobble for any woman, and after her arrival Nancy could be found at all times in her home, singing and working, nursing the baby and making happiness for Tom when he came home.

But if Nancy could not go to the world, some of her world came to her. On the long summer evenings Uncle Berry would ride out, sometimes with Aunt Berry on the pillion behind him, Jo Hanks would come swinging on his long legs through the forest, Mordecai would ride up and hitch to a tree on the edge of the clearing, and with him would come Nancy Sparrow and Charlie, or very often Giles Claibourne, who brought behind him blushing Hannah Lystie, whom Nancy had urged upon him for the cherishing of Gilly and his small brothers and sisters.

The whole party would sit out under the trees and great were the political discus-

sions waged. At that date the separate States were still ratifying the Constitution, Hamilton's banking policies were always under fire, and the Louisiana Purchase was a bitterly contested question. On one memorable evening Christopher Graham met Felix Grundy in front of the home of Nancy Hanks and Thomas Lincoln and "the fur flew." At all times the absorbing topic in the Southwest was the question of slavery, and these two slave holders met and did battle with Thomas Lincoln on his own ground. Elder Head was present at that famous discussion and he firmly "held with Tom and Nancy."

And if Thomas Lincoln spoke out in no uncertain terms, Nancy had her say on the subject, and her way was to the point and—prophetic.

"The Lord will take 'em away from you men who buy 'em. They are His people."

"The Lord made the man who invented

the cotton gin and by so doing intended slavery, Mrs. Lincoln," Felix Grundy answered, with the argument which kept America in political storms and retarded her growth for half a century.

"Wait and see," laughed Nancy in perfect faith.

The winter of 1807–8 was a hard one, but Nancy and the small Nancy kept snug and busy in the cabin, for it was easy enough for Tom to keep the huge chimney piled high with roaring logs, and the larder stocked with venison, bear, turkey and pork. Nancy still sang at her spinning and weaving, but a shadow of trouble lay at the depth of her violet eyes and she now took her own products to market herself, no matter how intense the cold or how bad the traveling. The merchants simply would not buy from Thomas Lincoln, and the fact was a most intense humiliation to Nancy.

"Why would n't you buy that bolt of but-

ternut from Tom when he offered it to you last week, Giles?" she asked Mr. Claibourne, with a simple directness as he counted out a good price for the cloth into her hand.

"A week's aging don't make cloth of a finer weave," she added.

"I was so confused after he got through a lot of abolition talk at me right in front of two of my niggers, that I thought I did n't need it," answered Giles with kind indirectness in stating his case.

"Well, the cloth is abolition wove and you know you can't buy its equal in the country," Nancy answered with her head high. "You trade in souls and Tom and me only ask a fair trade in cloth."

"I 'll buy anything you bring me to sell, Nancy," Mr. Claibourne answered her.

"You 'll trade with Tom Lincoln or show an empty shelf when the traders ask you for peach-blow cotton or plaid wove vest lengths," she answered as she swept out of

the store with scarlet spots high up under her purple eyes.

Nancy's experience with her friend Mr. Giles Claibourne was repeated from time to time at the other stores, until the fact was driven home into her heart that Thomas Lincoln was under a ban that threatened to throttle both her and his industries. When he went into town the farmers and traders and carpenters and mechanics stood around him and applauded his abolition views, expressed in pointed, strong words with argument of the Book to support his contentions, for they had no slaves and it was easy to believe as he did. However, they did not express their views with enough frankness to injure their barter and trade with the rich men of the community, who did own slaves and resented being taken to task for it.

But if Tom was fiery and inspired when talking in the village, on the street corners, and around store stoves, he was depressed

and bewildered and humiliated at home in the little cabin.

"Looks like standing up for the Lord's right is going to lead us into being mighty poor, Nancy honey," he said one night as he sat before the roaring fire with his elbows resting on the table and his head in his hands. "In the pride of their vain hearts they won't buy from me and you won't sell to them. What are we going to do?"

"The good Lord gave us this land and the woods beyond to make a living on and we 'll just do without anybody, and let 'em do without us. Adam and Eve prospered considerable until they got neighborly with the Devil," Nancy answered with a comfortable laugh. The dual passion of her life flared up in her eyes as she drew his head to her breast. "I don't ask nothing of God but you, and your heart clean for freedom, Tom Lincoln."

"Me neither, Nancy," he responded as he

engulfed her in her strong arms to which men were denying labor.

But to live apart from and without the world is well nigh an impossibility for pioneers, and also for men with a purpose in their hearts. Thomas Lincoln could not stay in the Wilderness with what he conceived to be a message in his soul, and he was drawn irresistibly to the town to "preach," and his talking grew more and more effective as it divided Elizabethtown into pro- and anti-slavery groups. During the spring he found that practically all work had been denied him and he was forced to provide for his family from the Wilderness. And as the days grew warm and the earth loamy, he plowed with Baldy, and hunted and fished and his little family lived well, with only the sense of injustice keeping them from being content.

And all the while Runt, the shadow, was also going his own way. He helped Tom

whenever there was need of him, but long days and hours he spent in the woods trapping and skinning and curing pelts of all kinds. He kept his operations out of Nancy's sight, for he remembered the scene on Lincoln Creek about the poults in their childhood, and she really was not aware that he had built up a very lucrative trade in Elizabethtown with his beautiful skins.

And the whole of Elizabethtown believed, or pretended to believe, that Thomas Lincoln, the abolitionist, was using the little black man as a kind of fence to dispose of his own productions to avoid their boycott, while he preached as he chose against them.

It was a cruel, bitter cruel, situation.

And Nancy had to face it on that early July day, perhaps the 4th, three years after the summer in which she had chosen between Thomas Lincoln and Clinton Meriweather before the eyes of all Elizabethtown. The last payments for the land out at

Noland Creek were due, and she felt that she must go into Elizabethtown to pay them at the Elizabethtown Bank, for she could see how Thomas shrank from business with his coldly courteous enemies. She dressed herself in one of her old blue homespuns, which was faded to the color of the heavens, put on her white sunbonnet, mounted Baldy and rode away from the cabin, leaving Tom and wee Nancy in charge. It was summer and she was young and strong and love-mated, and she sang as she rode along under heavy leafed boughs and over daisy-dotted carpets of green. The joy of life was in her strong body, as lissom as it had ever been, only made richer in curves by her easy maternity, when she slipped from old Baldy, hitched him to a rack and entered the Elizabethtown Bank, expecting to find kind Mr. Robinson to transact her business for her.

Instead of her friend, Clinton Meriweather rose to greet her. Three years out

in the world beyond the Alleghanies had not taken her out of his heart and he had come back with a bitter determination to make another effort to get her. Her developed beauty almost made him reel, as she held out her hand to him with a glad, hearty, neighborly smile of welcome.

"Howdy, Clint, welcome back to Elizabethtown," she said, trying to put as much neighborliness into her voice as possible.

"Thank you, Nancy," he said as he took her hand in both his and held it for a second between his hot palms before he let it fall. In both their minds was the memory of the similar greeting they had spoken at the moment of his undoing years before. And at the memory of it Nancy blushed, as a woman will, and the blush quickened Clinton's pulse.

"What can I do for you?" he asked, grasping at the straw of business to steady himself.

"I want to make a payment on Tom's and my land at Noland Creek. The notes are here in the bank," Nancy answered in a relieved voice and with a certain note of pride at thus proving Tom, the husband, a landowner to the discarded but powerful lover. "We could have made all the last payment if the winter had n't been so hard."

"Still the business in skins has been brisk," Clinton ventured cautiously, looking at her with veiled eyes. He had been told of the dealings of Thomas Lincoln through his negro and wanted to see if she were a party thereto or deceived by her husband; the latter he judged to be the case by Nancy's quick answer:

"Tom never traps, and shot skins don't sell for much. I wish we could finish paying for the land this summer, for interest mounts up."

"Maybe we can arrange some way to make it easier on you. I 'll come out be-

fore long and talk to Mr. Lincoln about it," the banker said with all his most gracious tone and manner. "We 're just going on being friends, are n't we, Nancy?"

Clinton Meriweather knew with bitterness that he was reduced to the old formula of friendship for a desired woman's husband, and he meant to use it for all it contained, for he had convinced himself that Nancy's situation as the wife of the Pariah must be changed.

"We 'll be mighty glad to have you come, Clint—if you want to—after you hear—we ain't got many friends now, me and Tom," Nancy answered, with quick tears rising to her dark lashes, thus putting herself outside the pale with her husband, though she well knew that the community would not so place her.

"I know all about it, Nancy, and nothing could keep me from—being your friend," Clinton answered her with the tenderness of

his voice so controlled that it only meant strength to Nancy's humiliation. "I 'm coming out Saturday and shoot poults with Lincoln if you 'll fry some for supper. I have n't had any fried turkey for three years, remember, and put on the big pot and the little kettle."

"Oh, Clint, I 'll be so glad to have you come as a friend to us. Maybe you can help folks to—to understand Tom." And in the happiness of having found sympathy, Nancy's tears overflowed as they would never have done in the presence of enmity. She was drying them on the ruffle of her sunbonnet while Clinton was administering a friendly and controlled pat to her shoulder, still heaving with swallowed sobs, when Dame Evelyn Robinson and Jean, now Kyle, entered.

Poor Nancy! The long winter of solitude would count as nothing in their eyes

against the one brief moment of friendly and sympathetic communion.

"She is shameless," Dame Robinson said under her breath to her daughter. But Nancy was too innocent and happy and friendly to notice the coldness of their greeting, which, to tell the truth, would have been colder if they had not felt a direct and watchful gaze leveled on them from the keen eyes of their good friend, the banker, whom they had come in to welcome.

And as she rode through the purple summer twilight, Nancy's heart seemed to throw off its burden and she sang as she had never sung before, as she let Baldy amble along at his will.

"Jesus, lover of my soul—"

her voice chanted out above the tree tops over into the home clearing and reached Thomas Lincoln, as he sat on the cabin steps

waiting for her, and immediately he stood up and answered:

"Let me to thy bosom fly;
While the nearer waters roll,
And the tempest still is high."

Then he went to meet her and they finished together:

"Other refuge have I none,

. . . . . .

All my help from thee I bring:
Cover my defenseless head
With the shadow of thy wing."

And as in the twilight Nancy went into the strong tender arms of her husband, her heart, which had been comforted by the thoughts of the friendship offered them in their defenselessness rose in her bosom with hope and gratitude.

And at that moment she clung to her husband as she looked at the evening star rising in the east.

"It 's true, Tom! I pray it 's going to be a man," she whispered.

Her prayer was answered. The child was a man among men and was called Abraham Lincoln.

CHAPTER XII

THE summer before her son's birth was a busy, hard one for Nancy, though true to his word, Banker Meriweather fended the "tempest" from her. The people of Elizabethtown really loved Nancy Lincoln and it was easy for a few words here and there from the banker to restrain them from making any demonstration of active dislike for Thomas, her husband, especially as her condition kept him near her and out of actively angry arguments most of the time. But all over the country the slavery question was burning with a greater heat, and the Runt, in his anomalous position creeping in and out, selling skins that they thought his master sent him to trade, was

breath on the smouldering suspicion and dislike they had for Thomas Lincoln. They bided their time, but they got him at last.

And her husband's frequent spells of depression only made Nancy more courageous as she worked through the late summer and fall preparing for the long winter, which was going to be doubly hard for her. Since Tom could not get work they had no money to buy wool or cotton for her spinning, and she had only the fleece to weave one tiny little garment to keep her future President warm, but she contrived a few fine cotton slips from her own things to put under his fleece. Also she depended upon wrapping him in the moleskin against the bitterest cold.

"I 'm mighty glad you can be a little happy, honey bird," Thomas said with one of his rare sad smiles, as he stood hanging her bunches of sage and sassafras and tansy and cammomile with strings of red peppers, to the huge hewn rafters that ran across the

cabin and supported the floor of the loft, which was reached by a ladder.

And Nancy answered him with the Madonna's words from the Book:

> "My soul doth magnify the Lord,
> And my spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Saviour."

"That 's the way I feel, Thomas, and I know I am carrying a blessed burden for you and me."

"There never was a woman like you in the world before, Nancy," Thomas said, as he looked down from his ladder on her with great reverence.

After the slowly dying blaze of autumn and the purple flicker of Indian summer had burned out, winter flung its blankets of snow over the little cabin, and sleet rained down upon it and the winds tore at it, but failed to shake it. Tom and the Runt kept the huge logs piled high and blazing, and by

their light Nancy read and dreamed, as she did the few tasks concerned with the cooking of the food for her family. When the weather was good, Tom went into town for the necessities, which were few, for they had provisioned themselves well against the winter need, and what they lacked in dried meat his gun supplied. Almost his only purchases were powder for his horn and coffee and tea for Nancy's pot. When the weather would allow it, Nancy Friend and Aunt Lucy Berry came out to see Nancy, but their visits were few and far between, on account of the cold.

Then just before the dawn of Sunday, February 12th, 1809, Nancy's hour came upon her and her son, Abraham Lincoln, opened his big gray eyes to the first clear sunrise in two weeks.

"Shoo, Nancy, I never did see such a child, he 's as big as a yearling now," Thomas, the father, said after he had performed the sim-

ple birth rights for his son under Nancy's directions, for neither of them had thought of calling for assistance through the dark cold forest.

"He 's a-looking right into my heart, Tom," Nancy said, as she watched a pair of big gray eyes open over the rim of her white breast, and seem to look up straight into hers for a second before they flickered and shut.

"He 'll never look into a purtier sight," Tom answered, as he kissed Nancy gently and drew the moleskin around mother and son, both of whom were immediately asleep after the trying ordeal of introduction to each other.

With the advent of young Abraham Lincoln into the world the grim weather broke, and by the time he was a month old, spring had come with her myriads of life buddings. Nancy was again on her feet—more full of life and strength than she had ever been, and also bursting with pride over the man-

child, who was such a wonder of size that many of her friends journeyed out just to behold him.

"Lordy, Nancy, this child will be Governor or git hung," the old stage driver Hardstay declared, as he stopped his stage and walked a half mile across to pay his respects. "The set of that jaw is to rule or ruin." Years after Abraham Lincoln lay in his grave, old Hardstay, nearing the century mark, would take pride in repeating his prophecy.

And as the building season opened, Thomas Lincoln drove himself into Elizabethtown in fruitless quests for work. Builders never had a job for him, and while the men would sit at dinner time and talk with him and listen to him, even question him on his favorite political theme, he failed to find an invitation to "lend a hand." And this fact ate into his very vitals and made him come home in a state of utter despond-

ency and bitterness, a state which Nancy never failed to lighten for him with a steadfast reiteration of the principles of inherent freedom for mankind, which were making him an outcast.

"It 's not wrong to preach the Lord's right, Tom," she always affirmed.

It was Nancy's own faith and courage and love which supported her during it all, but she scarcely realized how much she depended upon the friendship and sympathy of Clinton Meriweather as he went back and forth along the bridle path to Elizabethtown, always shooting with Tom and bringing in the game for her to cook and eat with them.

He never talked politics with Tom but they swapped "Æsop's Fables" for worldly tales of the great cities of New York and Boston and Philadelphia, which Clinton knew so well. Tom never tired of hearing stories of the sea and the city which Clinton had collected, and Nancy was just as eager

for them as Tom. She would sit with wee Nancy at her knee and Abraham on her breast, and listen with her big purple eyes eagerly flaring into his, until Meriweather would be obliged to go home through the forest with a flame that was dangerous, burning in his breast. He was ready for anything to get her and he thought he saw hope in what he considered Tom's evident unbalance of life and character.

"She 's in a dream about the poor fool and something must wake her," he muttered to himself one night as he went through the woods, after looking back to see Nancy with Tom behind her holding a candle high over her head to light him to the opening of the path. "I must save her. I must."

And in truth the strain upon Nancy was becoming very bitter. Her people came less frequently to see her, because one by one they had acquired the necessary slaves to carry on their business, and they did n't

care to hear Tom's opinion of the matter. She had both the children to care for and Tom was now most of the time away in Elizabethtown, talking around the Square and the stores and making trouble for himself with each discussion, which trouble he brought home for Nancy at night.

Naturally, when Clinton Meriweather came whistling through the woods, it seemed to Nancy that she could slip by means of his stories and jokes into another world for a moment's ease from her heavy burdens.

"Tell me about ships, Clint, it rests me," she said to him one day, when he caught her at the ironing board, weary and hot.

And the banker believed that the time he bided had almost come.

Then the blow from which Thomas Lincoln never recovered his spirit fell upon him, and Nancy was there to see it administered.

It was upon the occasion of her first visit

to Elizabethtown after the birth of her son, who was about six weeks old, and she had dressed herself and him with the greatest care in the best they possessed, which was some of her own patched girlhood finery for them both. All the afternoon she went from one store to another doing her little trading directly, with no apologies offered. Also she offered no goods for sale, but she did exhibit the baby with the greatest pride to her old friends, who were secretly suffering at what they thought was her unhappy condition.

After she had collected her pathetically small bundles of tea and coffee, she crossed the Square to the front of the Court House, where a huge stump of white poplar had been left in the original clearing, to be used for the political speaking. Her horse was hitched near and she wanted to deposit her packages and look in the crowd she saw around the stump, for Tom, meaning to

gently draw him away from arguments that would hurt him. Just as she reached the outskirts of the crowd, Felix Grundy, the Tennessean, and old friend of the Berrys and Hankses and Lincolns, stepped on the stump and began to address the crowd. The year before, the act which prohibited the bringing of slaves into America had been put in operation, and feeling ran high in the Southern states among the Southern planters, who felt they must have the blacks to work their cotton and tobacco, trading in which the Northerners were making large fortunes. A large party of young Southern orators had risen to oppose the Jeffersonians and urge the repealing of the exclusion act under the threat of secession. Of these speakers, Grundy of Tennessee was well nigh as fiery as Clay of Kentucky, and wherever he orated feeling ran high.

As Nancy Hanks Lincoln, with six-weeks-old Abraham curled against her

breast, stood on the outskirts of the crowd, which was composed of most of the leading gentry of Elizabethtown, who always enthusiastically rallied around the handsome, rich and cultured Grundy, and a large sprinkling of the tradesmen and mechanics and farmers and workmen, she failed to see Tom standing just to one side of the speaker, leaning against a poplar tree, whittling a stick, but with fire in his eyes. The first she knew of his presence was when his big voice cut into one of Grundy's most impressive flights on the inviolable rights of property.

"Right here, Mister Grundy, please," Tom's voice commanded with such authority that even the silver-tongued Grundy paused and looked at his interrupter with attention. "Granted that nobody has a right to take niggers away from them that owns them like horses, was it right for 'em to be owned in the first place? Did the Lord ever in-

tend—" But that was as far as the abolitionist was allowed to get. The "tempest" of dislike was loosed on him and swept over the head of Nancy and Abraham as it engulfed him.

Gideon Robinson rose on a small stump near at hand and his sharp voice whipped his words through the air:

"That will do, Lincoln. No man who preaches abolition until we refuse to trade with him, and then sends his slave sneaking in to trade for him has a voice in this discussion. We want nothing more from you."

Tom's head went up like that of a war horse, but Nancy shrank as if from a blow, as she clutched Abraham closer to her breast.

"Tain't so," she cried, answering the dual charge with a woman's wail of agony.

"If you mean that nigger Runt, I freed him before I was fifteen years old," Tom said with his dark eyes fixed on Robinson's face. "I pay him for what he does

for me and if he trades, he trades for himself, free just the same as you or me. If anybody don't know it, I hereby declare him a free man."

Tom's defiance was the first act of abolition in Elizabethtown and it brought its storm. The crowd was an angry mob, from which Nancy found herself drawn with authoritative hands, lifted up on her horse and led out of the Square. Her head was bent over that of her swaddled son and she was weeping so bitterly that she did not realize who was leading her horse, until she was well into the clearing. Then she looked up to see Clinton Meriweather's pained eyes, full of sympathy, upon her. He was riding his roan, which always stood hitched in front of the bank, and he took the bridle path in front of her, leading her horse after him.

"I 'll get you home, Nancy," was all he said, and silently he led her through the woods to her cabin, silently he lifted her, with

her son in her arms, to the ground, and as silently followed her into the sunset dusk of the cabin.

"Now I suppose you 'll come with me away from the half-wit who can't take care of you. I 'll take you and the children to your aunt's, until we can get rid of him and I can marry you," he said, as he stood in front of the logs smouldering in the fireplace. "You 've suffered enough poverty and disgrace with him. Now you shall have what you deserve." As he spoke the will of the handsome, strong man of the world went forth to do battle with that of the homespun, pioneer woman whom he had promised himself he would somehow take and hold.

"It 's the God's truth, Nancy, and you had better go back to your folks," came an interruption before Nancy could make her answer, and Tom Lincoln stood in the door.

"I got away but they are a-going to come

to shiveree me in less than an hour, and I want to go out into the woods and lose myself from people who hunt humans like critters." As he spoke the fire of what the world then called fanaticism, a fanaticism which later involved the whole world, flamed in his eyes and his black hair stood up like the crest of a charger in a holy war. "Freedom is all that 's worth living for!"

Standing with Abraham on her breast, Nancy Hanks Lincoln made her choice between the two men, one offering all that the world could give her and the other—nothing, seemingly.

"I 'm sorry, Clint, but I hold with Tom, and good-by," she said with a smile that shone round and across her son's head.

Then she turned from him to her husband and said: "Pack little Nancy and as much as you can on the horse, and drive the stock along after me, Tom. I 'm going to take

myself and you and our children back into the woods on Noland Creek. The Lord will guide us to freedom."

And out into the Wilderness she went with Abraham. Tom followed.

THE END

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